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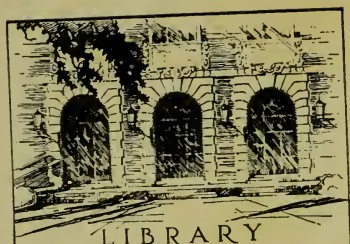

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A CHOICE OF EVILS.

A CHOICE OF EVILS.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF

"THE WOOING O'T," "FOUND WANTING,"
"A WOMAN'S HEART," "FOR HIS SAKE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
F. V. WHITE & CO.,
14, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1894.

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO. LIMITED, 182, 183 AND 184, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.,
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

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CHAPTER I.

A FRESH START.

To this letter Janet received no reply for a few days, when a stiff business epistle from Palliser's solicitor reached her, in which her decision was formally accepted, and she was informed that all the personal possessions left in Mr. Palliser's keeping should be carefully forwarded to her.

This answer agitated Captain Rowley a good deal, he read it more than once, then laid it down on the table, and removing his glasses, beat them softly and meditatively on it.

"This business is finished then," he said gravely. "I don't suppose anything would

reconcile Palliser to you *now*. I trust in God you will never repent."

"I have no fear on that score, my dear father! I am sure as time rolls on, you too, will cease to regret my resolution! For the anxiety I am now causing you, you must forgive me! I have suffered! *Indeed*, I have suffered much."

Captain Rowley sighed deeply, and after a moment's silence stretched out his broad, sinewy hand, and closely clasped his daughter's. "What's done is done," he said; "we must make the best of it! I must settle some plan for the future. I don't suppose we can stay here!"

"I do not see why we should not," returned Janet, laying her other hand fondly over her father's. "I do not fear to do so! This place has no sad associations for me, and you have taken root here. In a few months my story will be too old to be wondered at, or talked about. I should like to go away for awhile, until the rest of the six months before the decree takes effect is

over; there is no need to tell people just yet that I have parted from Randal. I shall, I know, be besieged with remonstrances."

"Yes, that you will! It would be well to escape the clatter which will certainly come upon us. I think I'll try to let the Bungalow for a year; after that things will have settled down, and we might see how we'd get on here, hey!"

In this suggestion Janet heartily acquiesced, and she left her father pencilling calculations on the envelope of the lawyer's letter, while she went to put on her wraps in order to plunge into the cold fresh air, for which she panted.

Long as she had looked forward to this crisis, and tried to picture it to herself, it was unlike what she anticipated. The one thing she had feared as most likely to overcome her was a fit of repentance on Palliser's part. Had he shown some perception of his own quiet, half-unconscious cruelty towards her, some remorse for the hard indifference with which he had repulsed her many efforts to soften and to win him back,

he might perhaps have induced her to forego her resolution to part from him, but he seemed quite incapable of understanding that he was in any way to blame. The gulf between them was deepened and widened, and Janet already felt her mind, her nerves steadying into a common sense view of her position.

"I shall feel like my old self before long," she thought. "Freedom will give me strength and energy. I shall find some work to do, which will prevent me from being quite a burden to my dear old father. He will be very happy by-and-by! Ought I to write to Tom? He will be furious—that cannot be helped. I do not think I need write just yet! I should like to go away out of reach first, or he will rush down here and make a scene with my father, and I may lose my temper! Ah! I have got through the worst of it—perhaps? I do not yet know how far I can resist the influence of disapprobation!"

* * * * *

After reaching this stage of the rupture, things seemed to go quickly. To Mrs. Bent it appeared quite natural that Janet should require change, and that Captain Rowley should seek a tenant.

Palliser sent everything that could be considered Janet's, and she was surprised how much she had left behind.

For this purpose he had sought out Mrs. Raynes, who was charged with the conveyance of the whole to Beachurst. The cold, grave woman was much affected by the sight of her young mistress, and evidently thought she had purchased peace and liberty dearly. She again begged to be taken into her service, adding that she would much rather be happy than have high wages!

Janet explained kindly and clearly that it was impossible, as her father's household would probably consist of only one servant. At this appalling statement, Mrs. Raynes burst into tears—but departed.

It was some consolation to Captain Rowley that neither Lady Saville nor Lord and Lady

Darrell withdrew their friendship from his daughter. That these, Palliser's nearest relatives and connections, did not break with her, was strong evidence in her favour, and he read the following letters with reviving hope and satisfaction.

"Cannes,

"March —th.

"My dear Janet—

"I have never been so stunned by anything as by the extraordinary story Randal has just told me! I hesitate whether to think you quite mad, or quite right! You must be prepared to have the most cruel and (probably) unjust suspicions heaped upon you, and to have your life and doings scrutinised in the most unfavourable spirit, at any rate for nine days.

"I could understand your conduct better, if Captain Rowley were as rich as I am sure he deserves to be, but I fear you have committed yourself to a triste existence, and though you are amazingly good, I don't sup-

pose you will mourn all the days of your life, because you made a false start! Why could you not make up your mind to let your husband go? He hadn't a pleasant temper, but he gave you large compensations; you would, as you grew older, have been quite a social leader, and you had such a charming house! Now, though Randal *is* my brother, and has been very generous to me, I know he *can* be horrid! Once you cease to amuse him, or gratify him, or to be necessary, you cease to exist for him, but there are many men like that, and some women. I remember thinking, when I was last at Mervyn, that you were going through the preliminary stage of agony, but you would have got used to it in time, and hardened into a very comfortable condition. However, it is all over now. Randal is in a white fury—I never saw a man so mad with mortification!—you have certainly paid him out. Of course he took off the mask before me, still he is not mean. I asked him if he wished me to break with you. He said No! I was to do as

I liked, only I was never to mention your name before him. That is but natural, so I am not going to break with you, dear! I was always fond of you; you are the only good woman I ever met who was not tiresome!

"The people who have our place are going away. Should we return, you must come and stay with me. I should be so pleased to see you.

"Is there no chance of your patching up a peace with Randal? Could I do anything towards such a consummation? We came here about ten days ago, hoping the change would do Sir Frederic good, but he is still very indifferent and terribly depressed. I had a letter from Alec a day or two ago. They are quartered at Rawul Pindi. He has made great friends with Maurice Winyard, who was wonderfully good to him when he was ill last Autumn. My kind love to Captain Rowley.

"Ever your attached,

"GERTRUDE SAVILLE."

"I am afraid," said Captain Rowley gravely, as he took off his pince-nez, "I am afraid Lady Saville is a trifle flighty—she treats a serious matter very flippantly."

"She is very kind and sympathetic, but it is her style; she doesn't mean half she says," returned Janet.

"Anyhow, she means all this!" tapping the letter with his glasses.

"She means to be very kind, dad!"

The other epistle was dated from Rome.

"My dear young Friend,

"I must call you this until I know how you wish to be addressed. I have rarely been so disturbed as by this disastrous split between you and Mr. Palliser. *Why* did you not seek the intervention of friends before it was too late? You have placed yourself in a cruelly false and difficult position—a position in which the least indiscretion may be ruinous." The writer proceeded to enlarge on the error of judgment committed by her young friend, and the insurmountable barrier

she had placed between her husband and herself. "I confess," continued Lady Darrell, "I perceived that you were not as happy as your friends might have wished, even in the early days when first I had the pleasure of knowing you. But patience and forbearance overcome enormous difficulties. I believe that your trials were considerable, still Mr. Palliser was *not* a bad husband as husbands go! It is too late, however, to retrieve what has been done. Though greatly distressed at what has occurred, I hope to renew my acquaintance—I will say friendship, with you, when I return to England. Pray keep me informed of your whereabouts.

"When we meet, I have no doubt you will tell me more than you care to put on paper.

"In the meantime, though I am sorry for Mr. Palliser, who will be credited with much worse conduct than he has ever been guilty of,

"I am yours, with sincere regard,

"M. DARRELL."

This Captain Rowley declared to be the letter of a sensible woman, and advised his daughter to keep it.

It was fortunate for the old sailor that his projected expedition to the Continent, and the arrangements it necessitated, occupied him fully, and gave him no time to brood over the unfortunate termination of Janet's brilliant marriage. He was further strengthened by the composure and contentment of her looks and bearing. She was certainly less pale, the dark shade under her eyes which had given such a worn look to her face, was disappearing, and she seemed to interest herself naturally and healthfully in putting away the ornaments and household treasures which they did not choose to leave to the care of a chance tenant. Yes! it was certainly very delightful to have so sweet a companion and assistant, but it was a terrible business for all that.

The hardest task at this time to Janet, was to keep on the mask in her intercourse with

Mrs. Bent, but that kind friend thought it perfectly natural that she should try to cheat time by movement and variety; she was quite anxious that Captain Rowley should succeed in finding a nice tenant for his cottage, and did her best to find one for him.

"I have heard of something quite suitable," she exclaimed one morning, having come through the rain to pay an early visit to Janet. "Mr. Dalton, a friend of my husband's, is ordered to join his ship—he has only one little girl who is very delicate, and must stay near the sea. Mrs. Dalton's people live down here too, so they want a small, pretty house, and I have advised her to look at this. The difficulty is, she wants it for a year, and you will probably wish to return in three or four months!"

"I think my father might let her have it for a year!" returned Janet quickly.

"If he could, I think it might do nicely. She wants to come in soon, as Mr. Dalton would like to see her settled before he starts."

"We could leave in three or four days;

we have been making preparations for the last fortnight."

The following day Mrs. Dalton called and saw the house, and liking it very much, the matter was soon settled, the incoming tenants gladly agreeing to take Mrs. Brown also.

This arrangement set Captain Rowley's mind free to concentrate itself on their plan of travel. He was a strict economist, and enjoyed making twopence go as far as some would a shilling; but he was no niggard, and his savings were generally effected at his personal cost. His financial management had become an occupation and amusement to him, from which his mind had been painfully diverted by the shock of Janet's amazing determination.

When he had grown a little accustomed to the idea of such unheard-of conduct, his old faith in his daughter, which had greatly increased of late years, helped to reconcile him to her strange views.

"If a girl like Janet," he thought, "clear-headed, tender, affectionate, and thoroughly

dutiful, felt justified in taking such a step, she must have some supremely good reason, something too bad to be revealed, and the greatest kindness her father could show her was to acquiesce in her decision, and not vex her with any questions." A slow, but steadily increasing sense of indignation against Palliser developed in the old man's heart—all the stronger, for the silence respecting it which he imposed upon himself. Yes! he could not, would not doubt that his child could justify her conduct if she chose; and one day she might confess all to her old dad who only lived for her; for that day he would wait with patient fidelity.

Having regained a more settled mood, Captain Rowley gave himself up to his calculations and estimates. They could travel cheaply, and live for a small outlay, but a margin must be left for such nicety and comfort as Janet would miss, after the luxuries of her married life.

"She is looking better, decidedly better, bless her heart!" the old man mused, pausing

in a careful revision of his banking account. "She is pale and thin, but her eyes are more restful and brighter! It's cruel to have her life blighted at little more than six-and-twenty. Is it blighted though? There's lots of vitality in her yet—if, as time goes on, she doesn't miss her beautiful home, and the finery that surrounded her, and fret over it all—ah! well, she has a stout heart."

Here his musings were interrupted by Janet's entrance with an open letter.

"Here is a very kind invitation from Tom's wife," she said; "they both want us to spend a few days with them as we pass through town."

"What would you like to do, Janet?"

"I should rather not go to them! It would really be taking advantage of their hospitality on false pretences, for you may be quite sure that Tom will be furious with me, when he knows I have broken away from Mr. Palliser."

"Ay, that he will!" returned Captain Rowley, leaning back in his chair, and

thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets with a troubled sigh.

"You must not worry about the fury, when it comes, dearest Dad! You are going to trust me, to stand by me, and so long as we love each other, we will not care for the outer world!"

"Just so, my dear, but Tom is not exactly outside, and both he and his wife have been very nice and kind all through this business."

"They were, I know, and their displeasure will be all the greater in consequence. However, we must bear that, and we shall get over it. I think our best plan would be not to stay in London at all!"

"Just so!" cried her father; "we'll take an early train, have a bit of dinner at Victoria, and travel by Newhaven and Dieppe the same night to Paris. You are sure it will not be too much for you?"

"Not in the least—I am much stronger than I was a week ago."

Captain Rowley looked earnestly at her in silence for an instant.

"I believe you are," he said, "I believe you are."

"If you would like to stay in Paris for a week, there is no reason why we should not," she paused and continued with a slight effort, "I see in this morning's paper that Mr. R. Palliser, M.P. for Southshire, had an interview with the Home Secretary, so there will be no chance of running against him in Paris. I am glad," she added reflectively, "to see he interests himself in politics again!"

"Do you care what he does?" asked her father abruptly.

"Not acutely, but I am sorry to cause him any pain, and the sooner he can forget the annoyance and mortification of the present, the sooner I too can forget. Would you like to stay in Paris, dear?"

"Yes, I should! It's a place I have never seen, and with your guidance, my pet, for you know it, I shall enjoy going round."

"I have been there three times," she returned with a far-away look, "and know it pretty well."

"All right," said Captain Rowley, taking up a packet of papers folded lengthways and turning them over. "I've the address of a boarding house that was strongly recommended to me. Here it is, Rue de Madame —Madame Street, it's a queer name—do you know where it is?"

"Not exactly, but I fancy it is somewhere near the Luxembourg—I should rather like that quarter. Now I shall go and write to Mrs. Tom—and dear father, I shall be in light marching order by to-morrow afternoon, so fix the time of departure on Wednesday when you like!"

"That's right, my dear. I met Bent this morning, and promised to dine with them on our last day."

"Very well!" said Janet, and left the room thinking, "Will they invite us when we return and everything is known?"

* * * * *

The last evening was a little *triste*, though the host tried to cheer his friends by painting the happiness which awaited them on their

return—which made Janet feel herself a thorough impostor. The children were permitted to sit up later than usual in order to say good-bye to their friend and playmate, and Janet had some difficulty in parting with dry eyes.

Both Mrs. Bent and her husband came to say a last good-bye at the station next afternoon, when they observed that both father and daughter seemed brighter and better than on the previous evening.

When the train had steamed away, the husband and wife set forth to walk home. After a short spell of silence Mrs. Bent exclaimed:

"I scarcely know why, but I feel an odd sort of uneasiness about Janet."

"It's not like you to be fanciful," said her husband.

"She has so seldom mentioned Mr. Palliser, and she never seems to anticipate or even think of re-union with him. She never spoke much about it, but since that hasty visit of his about three weeks ago she has been

absolutely silent. I wonder he didn't stay a little longer."

"If she took offence at *that*, it was just like a woman's inconsistency! She must know that he is bound to keep at a civil distance until the six months are up. He might so easily create talk and compromise her!"

"Well, I cannot quite account for my impression, but I feel a strange presentiment of trouble. I trust it may prove a mere groundless fancy."

"Of course it is. The only trouble that could arise would be if the devil put it in Palliser's head to refuse to renew his matrimonial vows, which he dare not. He would be hounded out of Society."

"Oh, I never dreamed of that," returned Mrs. Bent, smiling. Here they reached the junction of the road with one which skirted the common, and Mrs. Bent, perceiving the children at a little distance, hastened to meet them, while her husband turned towards the Dockyard.

CHAPTER II.

WELCOME BACK.

THERE was a note of preparation in Mrs. Bent's modest, but comfortable establishment, one fine evening at the end of April, little more than a year after the end of our last chapter. The best table linen and china were set forth, an unusually large supply of flowers adorned both drawing and dining-rooms, while the children were washed and curled, and arrayed in the freshest of their simple garments.

Mrs. Bent looked radiant; she was one of those fortunate women who, without a single good feature, is pleasant and attractive to the eye.

Though bright, there was a chill touch of east wind in the air, and a cheerful fire of wood and coal burned in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Bent had just stirred it into a brighter condition when the sound of a carriage stopping made her turn and go swiftly into the hall to meet a gentleman, who was in the act of entering, as he crossed the threshold.

"Maurice, my dear brother! how delighted I am to see you again!" she exclaimed, as she threw her arms round his neck.

"Why, Mary, you are looking blooming! Yes, it is a joy to see your face again," he exclaimed, returning her embrace. "I was puzzled for a minute at the station when your husband spoke to me, not expecting to see him. He looks like a good fellow."

"Ah, he is indeed!" she exclaimed with happy assurance in her eyes. "Come—come in," passing her arm through his and leading him into the drawing-room, while Mr. Bent saw to the traveller's luggage.

"Now, Maurice dear, take off your overcoat, and let me have a look at you." She helped him to remove it, and stood back a moment to gaze at him.

He was changed — yes, a good deal

changed. He seemed both taller and broader —browner, graver, and possessed of large moustaches a little darker than his hair. He also looked ill and thin, even lantern-jawed, his eyes too seemed considerably larger than they used to be, while something of sternness tempered their former laughing expression.

"You look much older, Maurice, and have been very ill, dear?"

"No, not very ill, but a long time out of sorts. I put off coming home rather too long, but I'll soon be all right. It seems such ages since I left home. I don't suppose any other piece of my life will ever appear so long. But for you, Molly, time has—well, not stood still; it has been most beneficently active; you look fifty per cent. better and prettier than when I left you."

"Ah, Maurice, there is no beautifier like happiness."

"I believe it," he returned, patting her on the shoulder.

"Where are your babies? I am longing to see them. I am awfully fond of children."

"And they are impatiently waiting to see Uncle Maurice," she replied, going to the door and calling "Frank, Kitty!" In another minute two little figures rushed into the room and stopped short just inside the door, clasping each other's hands, overcome with sudden shyness. They were nice, healthy, intelligent children, but by no means beautiful—indeed, the little boy would have been very plain but for a good pair of dark eyes, having a quaint little face full of fun, with a comic up-turned nose; the girl was about a year and a half older, with abundant reddish-gold locks, and a complexion like milk and roses.

"What jolly little souls! they look pictures of health," said Maurice. "Won't you come and kiss your uncle?" They still hesitated, then Miss Kitty took the initiative and advanced, dragging the boy with her.

"Are you really mamma's brother?" asked Kitty. "Used you to be in the nursery with her, and stick pins in her doll's face like

Frank?" she continued, making herself at home on her uncle's knee.

"Yes, and she tyrannised over me as I daresay you do over this little fellow."

"No, no, I don't. Frank is very naughty sometimes and will not do what I tell him."

"Then she gets into *such* a 'wage,'" cried Frank, "and throws things at me! but she never throws straight, so I don't mind."

"Really, children, I am ashamed of you," said their mother, "to tell tales of each other the first moment you meet your uncle."

"Oh, let them be natural," said Maurice, laughing. "They won't be the worse friends hereafter for having lived in a healthy state of warfare at first; from such beginnings noble friendships rise." And he continued to talk to them till Frank perched himself on his uncle's unoccupied knee, and, Mr. Bent coming in, created a diversion. Then it was dinner time, and Mrs. Bent took her brother to his room, closed the window, stirred the fire with loving care, and expressed a

wish that she could have made it larger and more luxurious.

"My dear girl, everything here seems infinitely comfortable and pretty! You don't know what bare quarters we have in India—at least, generally—by the way, don't give me any more fires. I enjoy the fresh coolness immensely. You home-staying people seem to feel the cold twice as much as I do."

"That is curious! Now I will leave you. How nice it is to have you under the same roof once more."

It was a very pleasant, cheery dinner. Mr. Bent took at once to his brother-in-law; both were straightforward, simple-minded Britons, not afflicted with intellectual cranks or subtleties, ready to do their duty in the state of life to which they had been called, and equally ready to believe that they were rather unprofitable servants if they did no more.

Mrs. Bent listened with deep interest to their conversation, saying little herself, but admiring the superior tone, the decision and

clearness of all her brother said. He had evidently been "a man in authority," accustomed to associate on terms of equality with men in high and responsible positions, yet there was not a tinge of boasting in his talk, which was absolutely free from any trace of self-consciousness.

In the drawing-room afterwards the conversation turned on the old home and Langford.

"And you think my father much more changed than mother?" said Mrs. Bent, as she sat at her work—some stitching for her little boy—in her own especial basket chair.

"Yes, he has aged greatly. He is quite unfit for work now. The mother wears wonderfully; I did not expect to find her looking so well. Life has been growing easier for her of late years, since you girls are nearly all married, and the boys doing for themselves except Jim—he is a bit of a rolling stone. But my father is very shaky. It is exceedingly lucky that Palliser has offered to pay an additional curate; my father could

not have held on as Vicar if he had not, but I must say Palliser is a model squire ; he is a positive benefactor to the country-side, not in a weak, sentimental way, but in a solid, common sense fashion. He speaks well, too —none of your flashy oratory, but logical, useful speeches ; I always read them for auld lang syne's sake. I must say I am awfully sorry for him—he has been deucedly ill-treated ! "

" Well, yes, looks like it certainly," returned Mrs. Bent slowly, " but we have been so friendly with Mrs. Palliser, or rather Mrs. Rowley, and always found her such a capital, reasonable woman that I cannot help fancying there was more at the bottom of the business than ever came out."

" It is impossible to say—as far as I have heard, it seems that our old playfellow had everything woman could want, and Palliser lived a very decent life, at least there never was any scandal about him—she really could not have anything to complain of."

" She certainly never complained to me,"

observed Mrs. Bent, "and we have been most confidential. But 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness.' Her father sticks to her steadily, but what his real opinion is we cannot tell. The whole sad affair was irretrievable before we knew. Janet wrote to me from Genoa—just as we expected her to return and be re-married—and said she would never be Mr. Palliser's wife again, though she admitted he had never done anything that would entitle her to a divorce, but their relations had become strained and intolerable, though she never wished to hear or to say anything against him—she only wanted to live at home with her father."

"That remains to be proved," said Maurice drily. "I must say it seems to me unworthy weakness not to be able to endure a little unexpected unpleasantness which would probably have passed over, not to mention taking a mean advantage of her husband's misfortune."

"That sounds very harsh, Maurice! I have faith enough in Janet to believe she

would not have acted as she did, if she had not better reasons than she gave."

"Well, I suppose you will not see much more of her—they will probably live abroad —the Continent seems the natural *habitat* for shady people!"

"My dear Maurice! you used to be so fond of Janet; I did not think you would turn against her."

"Fond? Yes, I was a fool about her," he returned, smiling, "but that was a long time ago, and no doubt I should have been in the same mental condition about any other girl who happened to live on the same terms with us."

"What a prosaic ending to your old romance!" said Mrs. Bent, shaking her head.

"That sort of romance soon crumbles at the touch of reality. I see you have a photograph of her here," taking it from the mantel-piece—"it is like and unlike! Can Janet Rowley have developed into this stately-looking personage?"

"It is a very good likeness, yet wants something she has."

"Looking at this," Maurice resumed while he gazed at the picture, "I can better understand her conduct—she had become a spoiled fine lady, ready to cry for the moon."

"She did not give me that idea," remarked Mr. Bent, "and in leaving Palliser for the kind of life she must lead with her father, she gave up a good deal."

"We haven't got to the end of the story yet," said Winyard, still looking at the photograph. "It is most unfortunate that she overruled her father—as I suppose she did—and let none of her friends know till she had actually broken with Palliser, which makes matters rather hopeless. I believe my father wrote to her very strongly?"

"Yes, and Janet answered very kindly, even tenderly, but was absolutely unmoved; she begged my father to contradict any reports to Mr. Palliser's discredit, and said that she had acted on her own judgment, and had no serious complaint to make, but that there was a degree of incompatibility between them in temper and disposition that rendered

life difficult, and that she was actuated by consideration for Mr. Palliser also. My father thought it was only just to comply with her wish, for there was a strong feeling against Mr. Palliser at first. Now, opinion has changed, and Janet is rather hardly spoken of."

"No doubt," returned Maurice, returning the photograph to its place with a sigh. "At all events, she has done for herself now!"

"I am not so sure," said his sister. "I assure you that Janet has the courage of her convictions; she and her father return here next month. I believe Captain Rowley offered to give up The Bungalow, but Janet does not in the least fear facing Society, formidable as it is at Beachurst."

"A very bad kind of courage for a woman to possess," said Maurice, and kept silence for a moment, after which he began to speak on other topics, and Janet was not mentioned again.

It was a real pleasure to Mrs. Bent to have the society of her favourite brother, and she had a good deal of it. Winyard was unequal

to much exercise or to any social gaieties for a few weeks at least. He wrote his letters and smoked in a comfortable little den looking on the garden, where Mrs. Bent often took her work, and, when the afternoon was fine, liked to walk with his sister, enjoying a game of play with the children before dinner.

In this intimate intercourse she found that Maurice was really less changed than he at first seemed.

He was still the old kindly, straightforward Maurice, truly interested in all that concerned those he loved. This was the home side of him, the exterior and professional one presented to the world was somewhat narrow and self-contained, seeing clearly if not widely, and seizing quickly the salient and important points of subjects presented to him, rigid in his sense of duty, ready to yield obedience to his superiors, as he was strict in demanding it from those under his command. He was a soldier by nature, and would never have fitted so well into any other profession. To him therefore mutiny in every form was especially

abhorrent, and such mutiny as Janet's, against the laws which were most essential to the well-being of Society, was peculiarly reprehensible.

He had a sincere and chivalrous respect for women, when they behaved themselves properly, but it was their business to be sweet, angelic creatures lifted above the sins and iniquities of the world through ignorance of evil rather than choice of good. For such women no sacrifice could be too great, but those who ventured to chalk out lines of their own and defy opinion, were on the whole worse than those whose weakness or necessities had dragged them into depths of positive misconduct. It was true that Winyard had only a pleasant, amused recollection of his boyish love for Janet. Yet the idea of her having joined the ranks of independent women was inexpressibly repugnant to him. Indeed he was glad that Captain Rowley and his daughter were not at Beachurst to disturb the tranquillity of his visit.

He went to and fro to town, as he had

business to transact, and more than once was summoned to an interview with the military authorities on matters Indian, much to Mrs. Bent's pride and satisfaction.

Meantime, the weeks flew past, and still Janet and her father did not return.

Their tenant had requested permission to remain a couple of months longer, so it was the middle of May before they settled themselves once more in their pleasant little home.

The time which had intervened since they left it, had been fruitful in many ways to Janet.

She had grown quite accustomed to her curious position, she had the satisfaction of seeing how happy her father was in her society, a certain restful tranquillity had calmed and strengthened her mind, now that she was no longer galled by the sense of being "on sufferance" in her husband's house, and a failure in his eyes. Then change of scene enlivened her. She often told her father that their slow and economical mode of travelling in out-of-the-way places gave her

far more opportunities of observing the country and its inhabitants, than she ever enjoyed when going about with her husband "en grand seigneur."

At Florence they met Lady Darrell, who was suffering from a bad cold, and while she remained they prolonged their stay, as that lady showed such evident pleasure in Janet's society, while she was charmed to be of use or comfort to so kind a friend.

Now that she was to face the ordeal of English provincial Society, Janet was curious —more curious than nervous—as to how she would be received.

She had made no acquaintances during her previous stay at Beachurst, it was therefore not in any one's power to cut her, and if people did not call, would it matter much? That would entirely depend on how it affected her father.

For the present she was pleased to return to their pretty little home, because it pleased Captain Rowley, who had had enough of travelling.

Janet too, in spite of her independence, had a most womanly love of home, she enjoyed putting the house in order, and decorating it with the pretty trifles and souvenirs she had collected during her wanderings, but what pleased her most, was an early visit from her faithful friend Mary the morning after her return.

Here was no change. Her greeting was as warmly affectionate as ever, and having exchanged enquiries and the first sentences of welcome and pleasure, they sat down for a long talk.

"You are looking wonderfully better, Janet," exclaimed Mrs. Bent. "More like your old self than I have seen you look for years; only you have not the bright colour you used to have in the Langford days."

"I imagine that is gone for ever," said Janet smiling, "but I feel very well, and glad to be at home again. The dear father missed his garden and his carpentery. I will never drag him from home for such a long time again! Still, I think he enjoyed seeing new

faces at first. Tell me about the children. I have brought them some Italian toys!"

"They will be delighted! They have been remarkably well all the winter, and Frank has grown very much, neither of them has forgotten you. You must come and dine with us to-morrow, if you can."

"You are very good, Mary," returned Janet, and then she paused. "I want you to be quite candid, dear; are you *sure* Mr. Bent would be really pleased to receive me? Some people, some men especially, do not approve of my conduct; few understand it, and I can never explain; but, whatever he thinks, never force me on your husband, Mary; *we* can be friends, and yet not trouble him."

"I will be quite candid! My husband really likes you, and believes in you, but I cannot say he approves of what you have done. He says he does not understand your conduct, so must not form an opinion. He is awfully sorry about it all, but he is just as ready as ever to receive you, and be good friends with you, as you will see when you

meet him! You know how honest he is. He cannot affect to be what he is not."

Janet watched her friend earnestly while she spoke.

"I am glad to hear you say this, Mary; so long as you and Mr. Bent stand by me I do not care for mere acquaintances. I have a few very staunch friends, but it gives me a bitter pang to know how gravely the Vicar and your dear mother disapprove of me."

"Time will soften that, Janet. If you saw them, and talked to them, it would make a great difference—people believe you when they see you."

"That is a high compliment," said Janet, smiling.

"You cannot think how much we enjoyed Maurice's visit," resumed Mrs. Bent, "he is so companionable, and so sweet with the children."

"Yes, I daresay," said Janet dreamily. "Is he much changed?"

"In some ways a good deal—but the change is chiefly improvement. He seems

ever so much older, or did at first, but now that he is better and stronger he does not look so aged — then he has great long moustaches which alter him a good deal."

"Great moustaches!" repeated Janet, laughing. "Do you remember how we used to tease him about his efforts to make them grow?—and how angry he was with me when I showed him a passage in one of Lever's books about somebody's moustaches, which were like the 'ill-omened fur on an antiquated apple pie'?"

"Yes, you could always make him angry, Janet, but he is really very good-tempered."

"In fact he has very few faults in his sister's eyes!—and Mary, what does he say to my strange story?"

"He is greatly distressed about it, of course, it seems inexplicable to him—and not having seen you all these years——"

She paused—hesitated.

"I understand," cried Janet quickly. "He thinks I have acted selfishly, badly, perhaps from some bad motive."

"Oh, no, not that—but he does pity Mr. Palliser a good deal."

"He might have pitied him a good deal more had I returned to him," said Janet, thoughtfully. "I see I must make up my mind to bear a no small degree of misapprehension; but time—time, the healer—will put all things right! I must be patient," she spoke as if to herself.

"And, Janet dear," said Mrs. Bent timidly, "do you never regret what you have done? It is such a change."

"Not for an instant! I feel younger, more hopeful, more in my true place, since I have returned to my real home."

She spoke with quiet earnestness, which impressed Mary, and there was a brief silence.

"I do trust you will be happy, as I am certain you deserve to be," said Mrs. Bent, softly.

Janet took and pressed her hand.

"Maurice is at Langford now," she went on, "he divides his time between us and

home, and now he is so much stronger he is more in town. I fancy he is in great favour with the military authorities, and expects a good appointment when he returns. It is all very cheering to the dear 'old folk at home,'" she continued, "and I suppose you know how kind your brother has been. He has taken Willie, our Benjamin, into his office, so we hope he will get on—he is rather a bright boy."

"No, I had not heard it!—in fact, Tom is so incensed against me, and with my father for taking me in, that he will not hold any intercourse with us—he wrote in a dreadful strain. I was greatly distressed at the time, but I am sure his wife egged him on—she, poor woman, liked her sister-in-law to be Mrs. Palliser of Mervyn Hall—and now both look on me as a disreputable individual; but really, there never was any sympathy between Tom and myself, and my father has seen very little of him of late years, so we can afford to wait till he is in a better frame of mind."

As she finished her sentence Captain Rowley came into the room, and a cordial exchange of greetings ensued. Mrs. Bent observed with pleasure that the careworn look had gone out of the honest old face, the strained expression from his shrewd, steely-blue eyes.

"Well, and how do you think Janet is looking?" was his next question after enquiring for Mrs. Bent's family.

"Remarkably well!—better, I think, than I have seen her look for years."

"By George! you are right—she is another creature. But we have had a fine time of it abroad—we rambled about all sorts of queer places—Janet was a capital pilot. We had a very pleasant time at Florence, for Janet met some uncommon nice friends there—Lord and Lady Darrell—who coaxed us to stay on, they didn't like to let Jeanie go."

Janet listened with an indulgent smile—she well knew the old man was eager to show how people of respectability, nay, of

distinction, were glad to keep friends with his precious daughter.

"I am just unpacking a case I sent home by sea, with all sorts of odds and ends we picked up on our travels—come and have a look at them!" he continued, "I have such a pipe for Bent!"—and he carried them both off to a little inner hall, where he was busily unpacking his treasures.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE STORM.

Brave as she was, Janet was glad when the first week after their return was over.

Things had gone more smoothly than she had expected. The little cosy dinner at the Bents', where the only guests beside themselves were a popular and highly esteemed local physician and his wife—had been very pleasant. She quickly perceived, by Mr. Bent's cordial, genial manner, that both she and her father were really welcome, and the slight nervousness which fluttered her on entering soon passed away.

Captain Rowley too was quite gratified by the reception given him by his acquaintances and cronies at the club, and elsewhere. The old man was much liked and respected, and many pitied him for having so eccentric and

unaccountable a daughter. The talk and scandal created by her determined breaking away from Palliser had subsided, and it was now many months since the society papers had had any paragraphs respecting "the late curious and dramatic incident in fashionable life," but the return of the chief personage to the little bathing place revived the former interest, and the public in general reassumed the mental attitude of waiting for some extraordinary dénouement, the appearance probably of the lover for whom most people—especially the men—supposed the ex-Mrs. Palliser had forsaken her former husband.

As yet the upper ten of Beachurst had not made up its mind to "cut" or to "call," and meantime the season was coming rapidly—when great numbers of residents let their houses and went to little inland or mountain resorts for *their* change of air, and there was a kind of social interregnum of two or three months.

This space of time, it was thought, would

give rope enough to the possible delinquent to hang, or to right herself, and for the result they tacitly agreed to wait.

Janet was quite content with the unshaken friendship of her old comrade and her husband, and soon settled down into a quiet routine of work and study, walking with her father, playing with her friend's children, and keeping up her correspondence with her ex-sister-in-law and Lady Darrell. Peace, and the delightful sense of being really at home, the most important and beloved member of the little family, was still deliciously new to Janet, and the old wounds and bruises were healing up.

Captain Rowley and his daughter had been almost a month settled at home, the last days of an unusually warm May were upon them, when early one day, as Janet in a very simple morning gown was busy in the drawing-room with duster and *plumeau*, the door was suddenly opened by her father.

"Here's an old friend you will be glad to see!" he exclaimed joyously. "Here is

Maurice Winyard," and that gentleman followed him immediately.

"I am indeed glad to see you!" said Janet with quiet cordiality, as she put down her brush and duster, and drew off the gloves with which her hands were protected previous to giving him one.

"Thank you! It is very nice to meet again," he returned with a certain hesitation, the outcome of a curious sense of embarrassment, which annoyed him though he could not resist it.

She was so much more like her own self, than the "great lady" she seemed in her photograph! Her occupation was so natural too, just what he had often found her doing at Navarino Cottage in her innocent girlish days. How steadily and kindly her eyes met his. Here was no consciously erring creature, ready to plead for pity and forgiveness, rather a self-respecting, self-sustaining woman, with heart and conscience at rest.

There was a moment's pause, broken by Captain Rowley. "I was just going down to

get a bit more oak at Stubbs', when I met this fellow, and what do you think he said? 'That he feared it was too early to intrude.' There! there's the refrigerating effect India has had on him!"

"It would have been rather cool to resume Langford customs after this lapse of time," returned Maurice with a smile—a smile that evoked a throng of sweet, sad recollections from out the misty background of Janet's memory, and softened the handsome brown eyes—at whose tender, appealing glances she was wont to laugh in bygone days. Certainly Maurice was a good deal changed, and in some ways improved. He was a fine, soldierly-looking man, but the bright, affectionate, impulsive boy was gone for ever, some undefined feeling of disappointment checked Janet's readiness to take up their old familiar friendship at exactly the same point at which it had been arrested; but she recognised that something prevented him from being at his ease and really glad to see her.

Then his sister's remarks as to his distress

at her (Janet's) position flashed across her mind. "He thinks me wrong, and mad, or bad," she said to herself, but she was not vexed with him, rather her quick decision was "I must convince and convert him."

"I hope you will always be the Maurice Winyard of Langford to us," she said softly. "Mary did not expect you quite so soon, did she?"

"No, I have been in London for some time, and got my business finished sooner than I expected. I am not fond of Town, so ran down here last night. The —th Regiment is quartered here now, and I have one or two friends among the officers, then, as you know, I have always been great chums with Mary."

"Yes! I remember. Ah! what a faithful friend she is!"

"She is indeed! I am a good deal fascinated with her jolly little children. They are very amusing."

The conversation turned on the Bent household, on the health of the Vicar and Mrs. Winyard, the marriages of the younger

daughters, and similar topics of the moment, but the past was instinctively avoided by all three.

At last Captain Rowley looked at his watch.

"I must try and catch Stubbs before he goes to his dinner," he said, rising, "so, Maurice, you'll excuse me. I hope we'll see a good deal of you while you are here. I want to have all particulars about the affair which gave you your step."

"So do I," put in Janet. "I assure you we Langfordians were very proud when the news reached us."

"It was an unusual piece of luck to get such a chance so early in one's career! If you will allow me, Captain Rowley, I will go with you. I want to go into the town myself."

"All right. I am glad of your company. You remember I was rather fond of hammer and nails long ago! Well, I do a good bit of carpentering now, I must show you my work-shop another time. I've brought a lot of

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new ideas back from foreign parts with me. Come along. Janet, go and fix an early day with Mrs. Bent, when they will dine here. It warms my heart to see this boy back again among us."

Winyard rose, shook hands with his old flame, observing, still with a slightly constrained air, "My mother will be very glad to hear you are looking so well," and followed Captain Rowley out of the room.

Janet stood still where she had shaken hands with Maurice, slowly drawing on her gloves again. "He thinks very badly of me, I am sure he does," she thought, "and I imagined that, knowing me as he did, from childhood, he could never have doubted that anything short of a deep-rooted unanswerable reason would have induced me to leave my husband. What motive can he possibly attribute to me? I shall never know, for I can never broach the subject to him and he— I wonder if I could interest him enough to begin it? I *am* disappointed. I expected Maurice would have been ready to champion

me with or without reason! He has certainly developed out of the 'all for love'—stage, I suppose it is only natural, but I don't like him to think badly of me. I wish he were a friend like—Mary." She smiled a little sadly, and resumed her dusting, which she performed carefully and deliberately, and then proceeded to change her dress for luncheon, and sat down to write in her father's little den, which he gladly shared with her. Nor was she less gently cheerful than usual, though her tranquillity was certainly disturbed by this first personal contact with unbelief—unbelief in her rectitude.

As to Maurice, he had long ago thrown off the early passion for his playfellow, which had been the joy and torment of boyish life for at least a couple of years, but nothing had as yet quite replaced it. He had admired many belles, married and unmarried, in a slight and passing way, and their easy acceptance of his attentions had helped to make his play hours go pleasantly, but as he said, luck had soon given him a splendid

chance and whetted his ambition, which had already acquired a sharp edge, while his growing devotion to his work reduced all else to comparative insignificance. Still a certain halo of tender recollection encircled the image of Janet. When he thought of her, as he did sometimes, it was with honest, kindly regard. The notices of her dinners and receptions which occasionally struck his eye in Society papers, had a certain interest for him, though the idea that she was rather worldly by nature had fastened itself in his mind, there was yet sufficient feeling for her left in his heart, to make him sorely vexed and disgusted when the news of her extraordinary conduct reached him. One and only one solution of the riddle suggested itself to his mind—she had attached herself to some other man, and so took advantage of Palliser's misfortunes to shake him off and wed some favoured lover when sufficient time had elapsed to shroud Mrs. Grundy's keen eyes, and throw scandal off the scent.

But to-day, when he had parted with

Captain Rowley and went for a solitary stroll round the ramparts of Kingsport, he found himself less convinced than before that Janet was a self-indulgent and rather unprincipled woman. What fine, steady, truthful eyes she had!—how sweet and frank her smile was! There was a finished, easy composure in her manner which bespoke large social experience of a high class and yet did not destroy a certain transparent naturalness—her voice, too, was softer and more carefully modulated, but, had he been blindfolded, Winyard would have recognised it anywhere. Yes, he was sternly disposed to condemn her. Nevertheless, her image haunted him, her voice sounded in his ear—in his heart, and he was furious with himself for a decided longing to go back to the Bungalow and hear it again—hear it all the afternoon if possible.

"But I am not a moonstruck boy now," he thought, "there's enough in my life, present and future, to keep morbid fancies at bay. The best cure of all is a nice healthy, pleasant-tempered wife—an ordinary good

woman content to abide by the rules and laws which Society instituted for its own protection—and more disposed to stay with her husband than to run away from him."

As he came to this conclusion he reached an angle of the fortifications round which a group of young people came towards him, laughing and talking gaily.

Winyard smiled as his eyes fell upon them, for the meeting seemed a curiously pertinent answer to his reflections.

A neatly-dressed and rather rigid elderly young lady, with a kind, anxious face, held a small boy in a sailor suit by the hand; at her other side was a slight young girl of middle height, scarcely advanced beyond the school-girl stage, with a bright, simple face, and a fresh soft pink and white complexion; she was talking eagerly to her companion, through whose arm she had passed her own, while a boy of twelve or thirteen was pretending to whip his sister—as she seemed to be—with the long thick plait of pale brown hair that hung down her back.

Winyard raised his hat and the group came to a halt, the young lady's countenance becoming suffused with blushes.

"Do let go, Freddy," she murmured in an imploring tone—and Freddy desisted—but the ribbon which tied the plait came off in his hand.

"Good morning, Miss Grant," said Maurice with a kindly smile. "I see you are in the hands of the Philistines, or rather a Philistine —brothers are evidently of the same type all the world over!"

"Oh! I am sure you were never so bad as Freddy," she returned with a glance, half entreaty, half anger, at the culprit, who was swinging the ribbon to and fro as if to provoke a kitten to play.

"Give that bow to your sister directly, Frederick," said the elderly young lady in a severe tone. Freddy only grinned and made an attempt to run away, but Winyard caught him with a strong hand.

"Come, young gentleman—give up your sister's property!" he exclaimed, and forced

open the small, close-shut fist, handing the ribbon to its rightful owner, who proceeded to tie up her "bonnie brown hair."

"That's not fair," cried the youngster, "you should hit your match."

"You have forfeited the rules of honour by your unchivalrous conduct to a lady."

"A lady, indeed!—why, she is only a bit of a school-girl," sneered the disrespectful Freddy.

"You needn't say that, when I am going to the Government House ball next month, and will be eighteen my next birthday."

"Such a young scapegrace ought to be put in irons," said Winyard; "going towards home? May I escort you so far?" looking to the lady who was evidently the governess.

She bowed, and her eldest charge said demurely, "If you please"—and they proceeded together to where a steep footway led from the wall to the level of the street beneath, during which time Miss Grant prattled of her tiresome brother, who had disappeared, of her expectation of ball-

room joys, of a new pony her father was going to give her—the flow of her small talk interrupted every now and then by fits of shy silence when she became self-conscious—feared she was talking too much, and felt a little overcome, half by fear, and half by admiration for her companion, whom she had met two or three times at dinner in her father's house.

She was the daughter of Colonel Grant, who commanded a Scotch regiment then quartered in Kingsport; Winyard had known him in India, but his family had already returned to England.

When Winyard had left his young friend at her own door, he went on his way at a brisk pace, fearing to be late for his sister's luncheon.

"Eighteen!" he said to himself, "she doesn't look like it. Why, when Janet Rowley was eighteen she had twisted up her hair, and read me lectures on the necessity of diligence and ambition, and Heaven knows what—she used to give herself no end of airs,

well, no—not exactly airs; she never was affected, and she never had a soft wild rose colour like that child, but——" He paused in thought to look at a picture that came back to him of an incident in a blackberrying expedition, when he had climbed a steep bank to gather some extra fine bunches, and Janet standing below, her apron held out to catch what he threw into it—her face upturned, and alight with pleasure at the treasure-trove they had fallen upon, her fair graceful throat displayed, her cheeks warmed with more than usual colour, her hat fallen back, and her fair red-brown hair all disordered. It was at that moment Maurice knew that childish things had passed away from him for ever, and that he loved his playfellow with something of a man's passion.

"But she liked her own way, and by Jove! she always had it," he thought; "she was no soft, playful, caressing kitten, perhaps unfortunately for herself. A creature like Grant's daughter would probably make a fellow far happier than so decided a character as Janet

Rowley! Good God! to think she is Janet Rowley again!"

* * * * *

It was some days before Maurice saw his old playfellow again; he resisted the strong inclination—partly curiosity, partly reluctant longing to hear her voice—which drew him towards The Bungalow, and he had many engagements—for besides the reputation of a rising man, he was popular with most of those who knew him.

Janet was more hurt than she liked to allow, even to herself, by this neglect.

She fully expected that—although at first Maurice might disapprove of her conduct—personal contact would revive the strong sympathy that once existed between them; that Maurice should judge her harshly seemed impossible. She told herself again and again that it was really of no consequence to her what he thought; he had passed out of her life and could never again enter it.

Mr. and Mrs. Bent had dined at The Bungalow, and the *partie carrée* had spent a

very happy evening together, but Maurice had gone on a picnic-party, organised by Mrs. Grant and one or two other leading ladies, from which he could not escape in time—indeed, the excursion was wound up by an impromptu dance at the Colonel's house.

Ultimately, Janet went to call on Mrs. Bent one warm afternoon as she returned from some necessary shopping in Kingsport, hoping to find rest and a cup of tea at the Laurels (the Bents' abode), which was a sort of half-way house.

The mistress was out, however, and as Janet turned away, she met Winyard, who was coming from the beach.

"I am sorry my sister is out!" he exclaimed. "Will you not come in and rest?"

"Thank you, no—I shall do my resting at home as I cannot see Mary," and Janet smiled what she meant to be good-bye to him, but he kept by her side.

"It is an awfully hot bit of road," he said. "Let us come down on the common, there's a slight breeze there."

"That is one of the attractions of Beachurst," said Janet. "It is always fresh."

Talking of the most ordinary subjects with a certain degree of constraint on Winyard's side, they reached the Bungalow.

"Come in and have a cup of tea with me," said Janet, raising her eyes to his with a laughing look that transported him back to Langford and Mervyn Woods.

She was in truth a little amused at his palpable uneasiness, as she thought how little time and new experience had made him a man of the world.

The colour came to his embrowned cheek, and a resentful doubt crossed his mind: "Is she laughing at me as a prig?" He only said "Thank you," and followed her into the house. The sun was off the back of the house, and the pretty, pleasant drawing-room was cool, its windows wide open on the verandah which overhung the garden, and commanded the nearly land-locked bay.

"This is a delightful room," said Maurice,

going to the window. "You have about the best view in the place."

"Yes, I am very fond of our little home. My father, too, is happy here; he makes so much occupation for himself."

She removed her hat, and smoothed back her hair as she spoke, without glancing at the glass, just in her old careless way, and rang for tea.

"I am afraid my father is not at home, but he generally comes in for tea."

Here Mrs. Brown brought in the tea equipage, which Janet ordered to be put in the verandah, where they could enjoy the fresh, soft air which came up with the rising tide.

"Did you come home through Italy?" she asked.

"Yes, but I came as fast as I could, not stopping anywhere. After being more than six years out of England, I could not get home fast enough."

"Yes, I can imagine that, but it is very charming to travel in Italy! I had done all

the regular sight-seeing before, so last summer my father and I wandered about the little remote villages and castles of the Maritime Alps, sometimes faring very indifferently, but we enjoyed it immensely, and living is so marvellously cheap in these out-of-the-way places—a consideration not to be despised, you know!"

"Certainly not. Was it quite safe to venture so far away from police and civilisation?"

"There is no brigandage in the north of Italy, and many of the places we loitered in were under French government; besides, we had not the air of being rich. I should like to have spent another summer there, but the dear dad was, I could see, wearying for home."

There was a pause. Winyard was conscious of a delicious sense of harmony, of soothing content, of vague sweetness that seemed to melt away his bristling, half-indignant disapprobation. Janet held out her hand for his cup—what a white, slender hand!—and with

the left she lifted the "cosy" from the tea-pot; on neither was there a ring, and certainly the plain gold wedding circlet was absent.

"Had she taken it off, and thrown away that badge of legitimate marriage? This was having the courage of her opinions with a vengeance!" mused Maurice, as he stirred his tea. How tranquil she seemed, how refined and high-bred. Then her large, steady eyes looked through him, though they had a soft, pensive sadness.

"I must start in good time on my way back, and have a look at the chief places in Italy if I can," he said.

"Yes, you ought. Italy has a great charm for me. Do you remember how I used to rave about it, long ago, and bore you with my castles in the air about going there some day?"

"And you have had your wish, Mrs. ——"

He stopped abruptly; the word Palliser had nearly passed his lips.

"Mrs. Rowley." She supplied the name

quietly. "I understand that it must be awkward to call me so at first; I felt it very much myself; if you don't like it, which is quite natural, call me Janet—as you used."

"I scarcely like to take so great a liberty, but I cannot call you anything else!" exclaimed Maurice, with something of his old impulsiveness.

"I can see that you are pained by—by the peculiar position in which I have placed myself," said Janet in a low, but perfectly composed tone. "It is all too new to be discussed, yet, believe me, my mind is at rest. I know I have done what is best, not only for myself, but for *him*."

"For him — impossible!" cried Maurice. "I have the deepest compassion for your unfortunate—husband. What must his feelings be?"

"I think I know, Maurice. He has been very sore, but Time, the healer, is fast soothing his bitterness. Let us speak of this strange history no more except for one question: Maurice, we have known each

other, and understood each other, so far as Nature can permit boy and girl to understand each other, do you—can you believe I would have taken such a step if—if death itself had not been preferable to living with him?"

"There are many positions, to which death is preferable," he returned in a low voice.

"Yes, I know there are, especially if you feel you are in the wrong. I did not. But enough of this painful subject, I only want to be friends with you, Maurice (as we used to say in the dear old days) for the short time you will be here."

"I have no choice in the matter," he returned, looking down, and slowly tapping the carpet with his stick. "It is wretchedly unnatural not to be on the old terms, for God knows I have always believed in you as—as something infinitely superior to myself—but, Janet, I wish to Heaven you had stuck to Palliser!"

There was profound silence for a minute, and then Janet said in a voice that was not so steady as before:

"I suppose yours is the general view? I have prepared myself for this, but from *you* who knew me so well, it is a little hard to bear; perhaps time will throw new light upon the subject." She paused, and Maurice waited eagerly for the next words. When they came they were a disappointment. She asked, "When do you return to India?"

Her tone was quite easy and composed, and told him she did not intend to explain or justify herself. Maurice felt nettled; had she appealed to his feelings, and shown eagerness to convert him to a different view of her conduct, he would have no doubt adopted other ideas; as it was, he was offended that she did not seem to think it worth while to spend more words on the subject.

"I had a year's leave, and I have been home more than two months. I shall return about the end of March next."

"Earlier if you intend to do Italy en route?"

"I suppose so! I should like to see what

I could, for I hope not to ask for leave again for years."

"Naturally! your career binds you to India—it is a fine field."

Here Captain Rowley hailed them from the garden.

"Maurice there? All right! Hope you haven't drunk up all the tea."

He ascended the steps which led to the verandah, and greeting his guest warmly, sat down to enjoy his afternoon cup, and then carried Winyard away with him, to see his last efforts in cabinet making.

CHAPTER IV.

STARTLING NEWS.

It was rather a wet June that year, and consequently the "upper ten" of Beachurst were not in a hurry to quit their comfortable abodes, but after the Government House ball, a spell of exceedingly fine warm weather set in, and a demand for furnished houses suddenly arose, as the holidays approached.

Everyone therefore hastened to make hay while the sun shone, and with surprising rapidity Beachurst was left in the hands of the invading host of visitors. Mrs. Bent and the children went to pay their annual summer visit to the Vicarage, and Maurice went to see some friends in Wales.

The semi-confidential talk recorded in the last chapter, was the last of the kind he had with Janet, but his visit was frequently

repeated. He was always kindly but very calmly received, and conversation flowed easily between him and the object of his boyish affection. In fact, he was conscious that he never talked so well as to Janet—she was a most sympathetic listener, and caught even half-expressed ideas with swift comprehension. Then there was such simplicity and reality in all she said and did, such an air of pleasant refined homeliness in her surroundings, that Winyard soon grew restless and dissatisfied everywhere, save in her comfortable drawing-room. Already he began to wonder what enormity a man of Palliser's high character and unblemished reputation could have committed, unknown to the world, to induce a delicate, infinitely modest creature like Janet Rowley to accept the position of an unmarried woman, after having lived as a wife for four or five years, to leave a brilliant circle and a luxurious home, for the narrow limits of her father's cottage.

Maurice Winyard was a keen observer of

outer things, though inner-life was something of a sealed book to him, and he perceived how strict, though not penurious, was the economy practised in the Bungalow.

For some weeks he had silently watched for the appearance of that lover, whose existence he thought could alone solve the mystery of Janet's conduct, but he watched in vain. Gradually, in his many gossips with father and daughter, he seemed to have heard of all the people, men and women, whom they had ever met, and slowly, without any attempt on his own part to banish the belief, he found it fading from his mind.

Janet seemed so thoroughly content, so completely at home ; she in some ways, was so like the old Janet who shelled peas in the kitchen—was it centuries ago ?—and in others how different! The old impulsive girl who could not keep back the quick coming words expressive of what she felt or fancied, was gone away into the irrevocable past, and in her place was a charming cultivated woman, frank and sincere in speech, but quite capable

of saying only so much, and not a syllable more, than she intended.

Winyard did not stay very long in Wales. He found himself obliged to go to London, and when there he thought he might as well run down to Beachurst, and see the launch of an ironclad, which had been built in the Kingsport Dockyard.

Janet found rather to her surprise that she missed Maurice. His familiar presence seemed to restore something of her former girlishness and power of enjoyment. He was utterly unconnected with the painful passages of her life, and it pleased her to watch the gradual return of his old confidential tone, and the evident subsidence of his suspicious disapprobation. She was careful never to invite him to the house. Her father was ready enough to do that in his anxiety to provide some cheerful society for his daughter, and Maurice was equally ready to accept the invitations. He was not what could be called an intellectual man, but he took clear common sense views of life, and

things in general, and was Conservative by nature, so that between him and his old playfellow, there was a frequent friction of opinion which gave zest to their intercourse. But Janet little knew that she was a constant source of conflict in his mind.

To him she was still Palliser's wife, and as such altogether forbidden fruit. Yet he could not conceal from himself that his former passion for her was taking possession of him, more forcibly and overpoweringly than of old, and yet a feeling of distrust which he could not conquer tormented him.

Had Janet sought his absolution, or seemed touched by his disapprobation, his resistance would soon have been over; but she was so frank, so unembarrassed, so perfectly friendly and self-possessed, that she perpetually "riled" him.

Perhaps Janet perceived this—she was a close observer, and therefore Maurice Winyard was often in her thoughts.

A day or two before he returned to Beachurst Janet was a little surprised to find

a letter from Lady Darrell on the breakfast-table.

That lady had kept up a correspondence with her favourite since they had parted in Florence, though their letters were not frequent. Now it was only five or six days since Janet had had a long epistle from her ladyship, dated from Woodlands where she usually spent the summer and early autumn, and she had not yet replied to it. Another so soon was therefore rather startling, and she opened it quickly.

"My Dear Janet—I write so soon again because I have just heard some news, which I do not wish to reach you suddenly through any unfriendly medium. I do not believe it will affect you very much, for it does not seem to me that you ever regret the part you have chosen. Mrs. Carthew has been here for a few days—she is an old friend of mine, and a sister of Lord de Courcy, whose only child Hildegarde will have a big fortune, though the title goes away to a cousin. She was presented at one of the first drawing-rooms this year,

and is very pretty and distinguée, though of the butterfly order. Well, this heiress has fallen in love with Palliser, and he is nothing loath. Lord de Courcy was desperately opposed to the match. But he is helpless in his daughter's hands, he has never denied her anything, so they are engaged, and the engagement will be announced immediately. Probably the papers will have it to-morrow.

"Let me hear from you soon. I am going down to Devonshire in September, to a little sea-side cottage I have there, and hope you will come and see me there. Once Palliser is married, I do not see why you should hide yourself in a corner for ever. Mrs. Carthew thinks the marriage will take place as soon as possible.

"Ever yours affectionately,

"E. DARRELL."

Janet glanced hastily at this letter, and then put it in her pocket, determined not to say anything to her father until she had read it carefully.

"From Lady Darrell?" asked the old man. "What does she want?"

"She says she is going to her place in Devonshire for the autumn, and asks me to go and stay with her."

"So you shall! You have a dull time of it here, with an old fellow like myself! It will do you good. Lady Darrell is a deuced clever, sensible woman, and her son is a regular honest Englishman, with no nonsense about him."

"We'll see, dear, when the time comes," said Janet absently, as she handed her father his second cup of tea.

Breakfast over, she read the letter again carefully and sat thinking for some time, before she went to look for her father, whom she found inspecting a freshly-hatched brood of chickens, with which he was highly pleased, and he held forth on the probable price they would fetch with great glee.

After listening to him for a few minutes, she slipped her arm through his and led him into the study.

"I want to talk to you, dearest dad!"

"What is it?" asked Captain Rowley, with a slightly alarmed look.

"Nothing alarming! The real object of Lady Darrell's letter is to tell me that Randal Palliser is going to be married!"

"God bless my soul! you don't say so—so soon?"

"Not so very soon. It is more than a year since he knew that he had no wife, that he was quite free! Here is Lady Darrell's letter, dear, read it."

Captain Rowley put on his spectacles and read the epistle very deliberately. His daughter watched him with loving eyes, fearing it might disturb or distress him. His face, however, told her nothing. When he had finished he laid it down, and looked up very straightly into Janet's face. "That is over then," he said, "and I trust in Heaven it does not vex you, my pet?"

"No!" she returned after a short pause. "I may truly say the news is a relief to my mind. I now feel I have done him no injury,

now he is reaping the fruit of my decision. The Randal Palliser I married is far more dead and buried and gone out of my life than if the grave had closed over him. As to myself, when love was starved out, all sense of resentment and tenderer sorrow went with it, only the grey ashes of absolute indifference were left. He can never hurt me more. What I do mourn is, that so much of my youth died with my despised affection. I am in many ways old for my years. But the tranquillity, the kindly home warmth of life with you, dear father, is reviving me. Life is too precious to be wasted on useless regrets, and it is not possible for me to brood over disappointment."

"Ah! Janet! I don't think you are quite like other women. Perhaps, child, if you had persevered in trying to win back your husband, you might have succeeded."

"I doubt that. I know Randal well, and in truth I had ceased to wish for success. There is no use in looking back, the past *is* past. Let us try and be happy together for the future."

She stooped down and tenderly kissed the old man's brow, took up her letter, and went away.

What she said was perfectly true, the one source of self-tormenting since she had broken finally with Palliser was a dread lest her action might have injured his character, or would in any way influence his future for evil. Now all would go well—a young, high-born, wealthy wife would soon obliterate all trace of his previous unfortunate experiments in matrimony, while she, Janet, would be forgotten and left in peace to live her own life.

The greatest loss she had sustained was the society of the bright, intelligent world-trained people, whose ideas and conversation had done so much to open her own mind and form her opinions.

A certain sense of settledness calmed her mind and nerves, she felt she could rest and be thankful with a clear conscience, so she thanked God, and took courage.

The day Maurice Winyard travelled down

from London to Beachurst, he had but one companion in his carriage, an officer in a regiment quartered in Kingsport with whom he had a slight acquaintance.

Both were provided with newspapers, and while Maurice read the *Times*, the other man, being lighter-minded, skimmed a well-known Society paper.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed presently, "here's an announcement that Palliser is going to marry the Honourable Miss de Courcy! Why, the fellow is a regular Bluebeard, only his two former wives are alive, though he has managed to get rid of them! This girl will have a lot of money, and is uncommonly pretty, to say nothing of coming of a first-rate family."

"May I look at the paper?" asked Maurice, greatly interested, and he pondered for a minute or two over the brief paragraph:

"We are authorised to state that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. R. Palliser, M.P., of Mervyn Hall, and the

Honourable Hildegarde de Courcy, only child of Baron de Courcy, of Delamere Castle, who is one of this season's fairest *débutantes*. The marriage will be solemnised early in the autumn, much to the satisfaction of a large circle of friends who have warmly sympathised in the undeserved trials of an honourable and justly popular gentleman."

"He is deuced lucky," continued the owner of the paper. "Why, it was only this time last year that every one was speculating whether he was the biggest blackguard or the most unfortunate devil going; you remember it?—first, the divorce case, and then, about the interim wife that wouldn't go back to him—it was altogether the most extraordinary case."

"I was in India when the affair was being talked about, and these things do not interest me much," said Maurice, handing back the paper.

"This was quite out of the common! I have been told the second Mrs. Palliser, or

whatever she is called now, is living at Beachurst. She must keep very close; when we heard she was in our neighbourhood (that is, when we first came to Kingsport in May last), most of us tried to get a glimpse of her, but we never succeeded."

"I know the lady," said Maurice shortly; "she is an old friend of my family, and though we are all annoyed at what she has done, I must say she is a woman of the most unblemished reputation and high character."

"Oh, no doubt—no doubt! That makes it all the more extraordinary, for I believe that Palliser was a very nice fellow, and a great favourite with women."

Having said so much, he let the subject drop, though he exercised his mind a good deal as to the possible relations existing between Winyard and the very extraordinary woman about whom so many contradictory reports had circulated, who had forsaken a handsome, charming husband, a luxurious home, a fine position, to dwell in straitened

circumstances with an old half-pay father in a dull sea-side village.

Winyard gladly assisted to turn the conversation to other topics, and as soon as a decent opportunity offered, gladly took shelter behind his paper and silence.

The news disturbed him considerably; he did not quite believe it, but, granting the report was false, that it was current, showed Society was quite willing to accept Palliser as an unmarried man, and consequently Janet as an unmarried woman. Of course they had not been legally united; nevertheless, this repudiation of the old bonds seemed a terrible blow to the sanctity of marriage, and that a woman should be the first to deal it seemed to him extra shameful. Again, suppose this was a mere report, the probability that Palliser might, could, would, or should espouse another might revive Janet's affection for him by the counter-irritation of jealousy, and induce her to make advances which Maurice thought no former husband —legal or illegal—would be likely to resist.

Then how would he, Maurice Winyard, like the idea of their re-union? Conscience answered that it would be unbearable, maddening. Had Janet heard or seen anything of this rumour? He would call early next day at The Bungalow, and try to gather from the aspect of father and daughter if the strange report had reached them, and how they were affected by it.

As Maurice was leaving the train at Kingsport, he encountered Colonel Grant, who hailed him with cheerful cordiality, and insisted on carrying him off to dinner, as the Bents were still away.

Winyard accepted the more willingly, as he rather dreaded being alone, and he had hitherto, in his intercourse with the Rowleys, stopped short of the familiarity of an evening visit uninvited.

The rising young officer was most graciously received by Mrs. Grant, and by her daughter with welcoming blushes, yet Maurice was bored. Amy sang her simple ballads, by the maternal command, somewhat

monotonously, for she was shy and a good deal of schoolroom awkwardness still hung about her ; but she did her best to please their distinguished guest, and prattled to him of the picnics and races to which she had been taken, and the beautiful kitten that Captain Dalton, of the Rangers, had given her, adding many encomiums on that gentleman, who had lent her a horse when they went on that riding party to see the remains of a Roman villa which were lately discovered near a village some ten miles at the other side of Kingsport. But Maurice was not amused ; he thought he perceived a tinge of commonness about the pretty little *ingénue*, in her voice, her style, her self-consciousness. He knew that involuntarily he was contrasting her with Janet, and he felt it was unfair. At all events, whatever might be the latter's superiority in charm and distinction, Amy Grant would not have broken away from her husband at the first opportunity because of some crumpled rose leaf.

Maurice left early, and passed a restless

night, haunted by doubts, and pining for the power to put full faith in his old sweetheart, in whose presence he was never quite happy, but whose absence was a blank indeed.

A vague uneasiness and fear of what he might discover held him back next day from calling at The Bungalow till after the usual luncheon hour.

The moment the front door opened to him, he was somewhat surprised to perceive the odour of a fine cigar, certainly not of the tobacco usually smoked in a pipe by Captain Rowley.

The servant knowing Maurice well, at once admitted him, and opening the dining-room door, said audibly:

"Here's Captain Winyard, sir."

"Hollo, Maurice! come along in, my boy!" cried Captain Rowley's hearty tones. "I thought you were in Wales," he added, as Maurice obeyed his summons.

They were still sitting over the luncheon-table, which was prettily set out. Janet sat facing the door, she was looking very bright,

and was charmingly dressed in soft thin woollen stuff of a delicate grey, and had a few dark red roses in her waist band, but on her right was a strange man who, as well as Captain Rowley, was smoking. A stout, short-necked man, with large black moustaches and a blue black beard, close shaved, but showing through the skin. His hair too was black and curly, but on the very top of his head was "a bright and shining place." The eyes of this objectionable stranger were very dark, small, keen, twinkling, and conveyed the idea that nothing could escape them.

"How do you do, Maurice?" said Janet, stretching out her hand to him. "When did you return?"

Winyard's heart beat fast—for he thought he caught a look of pleasure in her speaking eyes, and heard a sound of welcome in her voice.

"I came down yesterday."

"Have you lunched?" asked the host.

"Yes, thanks."

"Captain Winyard, Mr. Valentine," resumed

Janet, with a slight gesture of her hand towards the stranger.

The men bowed.

"Will you have some lemon squash, Maurice? It is so very warm to-day," she asked.

Maurice accepted and sat down opposite the stranger, who gave him a quick, enquiring glance.

"As I was saying," said the latter, as if in continuation of an interrupted speech—"the remains of the villa are very remarkable, and splendid material for copy. They have never been really well done yet. No doubt they were accurately described and learnedly commented on in the 'What's-its-name,' you know, the antiquarian journal, but for the ordinary reader, the subject wants a lighter, more picturesque touch. Facts are all very well, but they are dry bones, and must be clothed with fancy or imagination. You understand what I mean?" to Janet.

"I think I do," she answered, her colour rising a little and then fading away. "Still,

it needs a good deal of historical knowledge—knowledge not easily attained by the ordinary writer."

"My dear lady! The 'What's-its name' has generously supplied all that. The date, the Roman General commanding this district at the period, the taxes paid, the exports and imports of this identical port. Every particular is set forth abundantly, everyone can get his or her materials, and the information is accurate! I know the man who did it—old Digworth. He is always grubbing up foundations at the British Museum, for other men to build flourishing edifices upon."

His voice was rather thick, as if he spoke through a muffling of mashed potatoes, though his tone was pleasant and well bred.

"But, Mr. Valentine, is it quite fair to use his labours?"

"Everything is fair, Mrs. Rowley, in love, war, and journalism. You don't steal the man's ideas—he hasn't any. He reads books which you can read too if you like—all you do is to take the facts from his pages instead of

from the originals. There is no use in putting too fine a point upon things."

"We must have a look at this new discovery while the days are still long enough for excursions," said Janet, in a slightly embarrassed way.

"Ay, do! and soon. There's a decentish little inn close by, where they can give you a tolerable chop, and a fair roast chicken, cream, fresh eggs, and such countrified comforts. The place is worth studying by sunrise, sunset, noonday. Then there's an old oak wood for a background, and a road evidently Roman to that place, Torchester, where they had a camp—it's about an hour and a half's drive—quite a pleasant outing."

"I am sure it is," said Janet, then, turning to Winyard, she asked, "Have you been at Langford since I saw you?"

"Yes, I stayed a few days at the Vicarage on my way up to town—they are all well, and Mary's babies most flourishing; they ride the old pony now," he added, with a long wistful look into her eyes. "He isn't

fit for much more than such light weights. Do you remember the day you tried to stand on his bare back and got such a spill?"

"I do, indeed!—and my father scolded you for letting me do anything so wild!"

"Ah!" cried Mr. Valentine, "boy and girl reminiscences?—nothing like them for a sort of pungent sweetness! Tell me, have you seen Lady Darrell since we parted at Florence?"

"No," returned Janet, "but I hear from her often; she is at her son's place and expects him next month—he has been cruising in and about the Norwegian fiords."

"Lady Darrell is, I think, one of the cleverest all-round women I know," said Mr. Valentine, with the air of stamping the hall-mark of true metal upon her; "you remember our pleasant evenings in Florence, when we used to argue about the Renaissance history—what a lot she knew—a lot of facts which she never paraded, but just let out àpropos to this or that. She must have done a heap of good solid reading in her time."

"Yes, the more you talk with Lady Darrell,

the more you see what a remarkable woman she is under her unpretending exterior. But—will you not come and finish your cigars on the verandah—it will be cooler?"

"A good idea," said Valentine, rising—and the three gentlemen followed their hostess.

"You have an uncommonly pretty look-out here," remarked Valentine, drawing a seat to the railing and gazing over the land-locked bay; "it's a sweet spot this—yet you shouldn't shut yourself up altogether. It's all very well for a few summer months, but London is the place for you, Mrs. Rowley."

"Who *can* he be?" asked Maurice of himself. "He is a self-sufficient cad—well, no—not exactly a cad—but I can't make him out. What business has he to talk to Janet so freely?—knew her abroad!—how deucedly intimate people get abroad!" It irritated him to hear this cool, presumptive stranger calling Janet "Mrs. Rowley" at every second sentence as if it were not a painful reminder.

"Yes," Valentine was saying, "it's a pleasure I don't care for, you see—to parody

Byron a bit, I'm 'a luxurious slave whose soul *will* sicken o'er the heaving wave,' so I avoid yachting. Darrell is particularly fond of it. The fellow is as hard as nails—can stand any amount of roughing and fatigue; I come from their part of the world, and hear a good deal about Lord Darrell. He is very much liked, but I am a little disappointed in him—I believe there's more under his brain-pan than people think. The misfortune is that he was a peer before he came of age. What chance has a man who is relegated at twenty-one to the national dormitory?—someone ought to bring in an act forbidding peers to be eligible for the House of Commons until they are five-and-forty! If Darrell was an M.P. he would not be cruising about the world and wasting his time."

"I'm told he is his own skipper, and handles his vessel uncommonly well—I fancy he ought to have gone into the Navy," said Captain Rowley, accepting another cigar from his guest.

"Navy, no—we want such men in Parlia-

ment badly. He is of no use in the House of Lords," and the stranger rattled on about politics, "foreign relations," "colonial interests," with the dictatorial force of a dozen "leaders"—at last he looked at his watch.

"Three-thirty, by Jove!" he cried. "How agreeable society makes one forget that time goes on relentlessly! I must be going! Captain Rowley, may I ask you for pen, ink and paper?—I want to write a few lines."

"By all means, come to my den."

"Who is this universally-informed gentleman?" asked Maurice, as soon as he was alone with Janet. She had been, like himself, extremely silent—indeed, it was not easy to put in a word.

Janet smiled.

"A great man in his way, I assure you! He is editor of *The Minerva Magazine*—we met him last year in Florence. He is an old friend of the Darrells—a protégé of the late Lord's. He has been very friendly with us, and called this morning quite unexpectedly. He has been taking a holiday, and rambling

about, he has come across the Roman Villa, and seems quite fascinated with it."

"He seems to be uncommonly at home," remarked Maurice drily.

"Oh, *he* would be at home with all the potentates of the earth," said Janet laughing.

Maurice was silent, and Janet seemed lost in thought.

"I have been very anxious to see you," resumed Maurice with some hesitation.

"Have you?"—in a surprised tone—"we have been quite well."

"I hope so—I feared——" he stopped.

Janet looked wonderingly at him, then the colour rose softly in her cheek and the expression in her eyes changed.

"I believe I understand," she said in a low voice, "you fear the report of Mr. Palliser's approaching marriage has shaken my nerves."

Maurice bent his head.

"Thank you, old friend, for your sympathy," she continued; "these tidings have not surprised me. I always anticipated such an

event, and it is in some ways a relief to my mind, for I see I have done him no harm."

Maurice could hardly believe his ears.

"I am amazed that any woman would accept him," he blurted out.

"I am not," she returned thoughtfully. "Mr. Palliser can be very charming, and may continue charming to this new object of his affection, and she will probably be better suited to him than——" she stopped abruptly.

"If he did not love *you*, who could he love?" exclaimed Maurice, not the least as a compliment, but out of the honest conviction of his heart; "besides, the reason I wondered any woman would accept Palliser was because he does not seem to me unmarried."

"Others will not agree with you there," said Janet gently; "he is perfectly free."

"Then so are you!" replied Maurice, but he did not say it joyously.

"That is as I feel!—and I am not without a certain sentiment respecting my own position. Time works great changes, but

after so ghastly a failure as I have made, I want no freedom at present."

"You are not a bit like other women!" cried Maurice, half in admiration, half in dismay.

"Because I have been a most unhappy one."

"Janet, my dear," said Captain Rowley, coming in hastily, "Valentine wants you for a few minutes, he is just going."

Janet rose at once and obeyed the summons.

"Clever chap that," cried her father, rubbing his hands.

"*He* thinks so at any rate," said Maurice.

"Ay, my boy, but he *is*. He's been monstrous kind to Janet. I'll tell you a great secret—never let it out even to your sister! My Jeanie has written little sketches of our wanderings, and Valentine has put them in *The Minerva*—ay, and paid for them! What do you think of that, my boy? —I'll give you a read of them some day"—lowering his voice—"but, mind you, mum's the word!"

Totally unaccustomed to literary people and literary work, Maurice Winyard looked on those persons whose words were printed as a separate but rather doubtful caste, except indeed, those giants whose high renown elevates them over all considerations of rank and social law. That Janet should be admitted even to the lowest grade of this exceptional class, was more an astonishment than a gratification.

He was for a moment speechless, and then he managed to say:

"You may be sure I will not say a word to anyone."

"No, no—I am sure you will not;—and what do you think?—Valentine wants her to write a paper on the Roman Villa, he says she has a picturesque touch! Hey, what do you say to that?"

Maurice murmured something indistinct.

"I must just see him off, he's worth being civil to, and he has been uncommon good to my precious girl. I'll be back directly."

CHAPTER V.

RETROSPECTIVE.

Captain Rowley was right in saying that Mr. Valentine had been uncommonly kind to Janet. He had taken a fancy to her when they met in Lady Darrell's salon soon after she had recovered from her attack of bronchitis sufficiently to receive her friends; and Janet had begun to feel more herself after breaking away from the fetters of her former life.

They had rambled about Florence together, as Captain Rowley did not care much for pictures, statuary or old palaces, and a curious sort of friendship grew up between the rather self-sufficient, largely-experienced editor, with his highly-trained critical faculty, and the refined, thoughtful, naturally enthusiastic woman whose spirit and intelligence was beginning to revive after its long sup-

pression, from the paralysing effect of constant indifference and misunderstanding.

Nothing had drawn her out of herself so much as these walks and talks with the shrewd philosophic little sybarite, whose rather self-indulgent bachelor life had not yet quite stifled his heart. From Lady Darrell he had heard her "plain unvarnished tale," which had interested him profoundly, and when they parted, he had expressed a hope to meet her again and begged her to let him know their (her father's and her own) whereabouts from time to time.

At this outset of her new life, Janet's mind was much exercised by the question what "shall I do" not to be saved, but "to make a little money?"

She felt she must be in some degree a burden on her father's slender resources, and she burned with an eager desire to earn enough to provide for her own personal expenditure; she shrank almost morbidly from asking her father for a penny, yet what was she to do? She could not play nor sing,

save in the simplest, the most amateur fashion—for teaching she was untrained; and besides it would worry and annoy her father to know she attempted anything that would take her outside her own home. At last, one evening, inspired by the beauty of the sunset in a curious little old village among the Maritime Alps, the peculiarities of which had greatly interested her, she tried to write a description of it and its people, and the wild rough road which led to it; this, her first effort, she sent to her literary friend with much trepidation, fearing he might mock at her boldness. In due time it was returned to her. At first she did not venture to open the little parcel, fearing the curt, contemptuous comments which she fancied must be enclosed within it. Finally, one night before going to bed, and in the privacy of her own room, she took heart and examined its contents. To her joy she found that Valentine's letter, though full of severe criticism, was most encouraging.

He pointed out many faults in her MS.,

and suggested improvements, but he ended by saying that he believed she had the gift of description, and that if she had the patience to re-write her paper, by the light of his remarks, he would give it his favourable consideration.

It need scarcely be said that she gladly took the hint, and the friendly editor thought the amended contribution worthy of insertion in that well-known and popular periodical *The Minerva*. This was the beginning of a delightful occupation, which did Janet immense service. It took her thoughts from the past, and it opened up the possibility of future independence. She gave her whole mind to fit herself for literary work, reading carefully the best authors in French as well as English, and improving herself in Italian, which in the abundant leisure of her past years she had studied; with the help of the latter she managed to pick up the patois of the peasants in the border territory of the Maritime Alps, and here and there made acquaintances with the *curés* of the mountain

parishes. Then the pride and excitement of her father gave her the keenest pleasure, so altogether the discovery of this hitherto uncultivated gift lent a fresh and unexpected pleasure to life; Valentine not only accepted several of her sketches, but suggested other vehicles of publication, and Janet soon perceived how "good a thing it was" to have an experienced and potent editor for a guide.

As her greatest wish at present was to avoid notice and pass into oblivion as soon as possible, she was most careful to guard her incognita, and poor Captain Rowley had hardly spoken his avowal to Maurice Winyard before he bitterly regretted it. In vain he told himself that he was quite safe, that Maurice would never let out anything he had promised to keep secret, but he felt that his daughter must read the damning fact of betrayal as soon as she looked in his face. However, she was far too much taken up with the proposed work offered her by Valentine to notice her father's countenance.

"I am half afraid of this undertaking,"

she said, when they were alone together that evening, "and I do not quite like availing myself of that archæological gentleman's work. I must acknowledge my indebtedness to him, in some way."

"Oh! don't you fear, my pet, you'll do it right well; as to the rest, be guided by Valentine. He is a first-rate chap."

"We shall see what I can do when I have read that article in *The Archæologist*. I hope it will not cost very much to stay at that place?"

"No, no, it shall not—not more than hiring a carriage two or three days running to drive over there. Let me see. I fancy we might go by train to Barrett's Cross, and I think I heard they had started an omnibus from the station to the villa, for the summer visitors, you know."

"I hope not," said Janet, "it would make the place very disagreeable."

"I'll go over there by train myself to-morrow. I don't think it can be more than three or four miles from the station,

so if necessary I can walk. I'll find out prices and everything."

"Dearest dad! you must not tire yourself," she said laying her hand fondly on his shoulder.

They were in his den, and she was standing by him as he sat in his favourite chair writing up what he termed the "Log," a diary of each day's doings, which included the starting and extinguishing of fires, the state of the weather, the planting of vegetables and flowers, the setting of hens, and the hatching of broods.

"My pet! I am equal to that and more, I thank God. I want to live a good while yet, really to *live*, you know—my business now is to take care of you, and do all I can for you, until you are old enough and strong enough to live alone."

"Hush, dear!" she whispered, laying her hand softly on his mouth, "do not say that terrible word! Stay, oh, stay with me, as long as ever you can—take care of yourself, you are all the world to me, and I have disappointed *you!*"

"No, no such thing!" eagerly. "Whatever I once thought I am convinced *now*, that you must have had sound reasons for what you did, and I praise God for leaving me here to be of use to you. But—but—I wish Tom had been wiser and kinder!"

"He will come round yet, dear! Time heals almost everything!"

"May be so, may be so! Well, my pet, I'll start to-morrow early after breakfast, and be back to dinner—and—bring back all necessary information."

The following day did not hang heavy on Janet's hands. Breakfasting a little earlier than usual, she set forth for a ramble in the woods which approached the beach near the Bungalow, while the day was young and cool, intending to spend the rest of it at home. She went out by a little gate in the paling which fenced the garden, on the common here narrowed to a mere strip between the Captain's domain and the low embankment which bordered it.

She had not gone far, when a rough terrier,

with a stumpy tail and pathetic eyes, came running to greet her, and she recognised "Tony," the Bents' dog, with whom she was great friends.

"Why, Tony! are you playing truant to be here so far from home?"

Tony barked a reply which sounded exculpatory; while she spoke to him a figure rose up from beside an old boat in the shade of which it had been lying, and came towards her. She recognised Winyard.

"You are out early," he said, as he took her proffered hand.

"And so are you; it is not yet half-past nine."

"I always get up early when I cannot sleep," returned Maurice.

"I suppose your sleep has not come back rightly yet? Are you feeling quite well again, Maurice?"

"Yes, perfectly! I am getting impatient of idleness, and longing to be back in India and at work again."

"Are you tired of us all then?" she asked,

as he fell into step and they walked on together.

"No, I am not given to change, as you must know, and I am heartily fond of my own people; but I have been uprooted and planted in another soil, and in that soil my future, my ambition, my work, must grow. It is not unnatural that I wish to return to it!"

"Not at all," she returned with a slight sigh, "as a man you are right! I think had I been a man, I might have been rather ambitious, as a woman I have not a spark of it."

"I begin to suspect you have not," said Winyard with some significance. "Then what do you think life worth living for?"

"I am not sure." She was silent for an instant, then went on, "I am inclined to think life itself is worth living for—I am afraid I am somewhat low and indistinct in my ideas! To me, that which really transforms mere existence into life, is love (I mean affection) and happiness!"

"Two things rarely found, save in small quantities."

"Nonsense, Maurice! *you* have had plenty of both, all your people loved you heartily! You have had health, hunting, and success in India, you have a fine career opening before you—very few men have so much of this world's goods."

"It sounds a splendid sum total, but there's a *per contra* that I must detail: first, my warmest affection was nipped in the bud by your cruelty," said Winyard, with a pleasant laugh, which was more like the Maurice of boyish days than any Janet heard since they had met last.

"Ah! that did you very little harm," she returned smiling, "you were no doubt soon consoled."

"Well, not so very soon; but soldiering was a great distraction, and the impressions of a boy are fleeting—they do not cut deep down as a man's do!"

"I suppose not! So a man ought to be careful how he allows himself to be im-

pressed, as he is a reasonable being," returned Janet rather absently.

"Is a man responsible for such impressions?" asked Maurice. "The mischief is so often done before the sufferer is aware—he knows nothing till some vital part is touched, and then he finds it's all over with him!"

"It is all a mystery which no one can understand or account for," said Janet, "but in this—as in most things—you men have the best of it! You have so much work—absorbing work—to do, so much legitimate ambition, that if a man is fit for man's place in the world, he cannot have time, nor room in heart or mind, for much sentimental love."

"And yet if a man is not ready to break his heart on the smallest provocation, you women call him a heartless brute!" exclaimed Maurice.

"Men and women are exceedingly unreasonable towards each other. We haven't really much to reproach each other with!"

Maurice was silent for a minute, and then said:

"You have grown very philosophic, Janet!"

It was rarely he called her by her name, and it thrilled her with a curious sense of tender regret for the past—for her own youth.

It was so like old times to wander in the woods with Maurice, she longed to open her heart to him, and tell him everything. He was almost his old self to-day, but the fear of some unsympathetic strain in his matured nature—of which she was vaguely but deeply conscious—warned her to keep the gates of silence fast locked, and so defy his power to wound or to humiliate her.

"Formerly you were always ready for the fray, and eager to dispute all opposing opinions to the bitter end," Maurice continued.

"Since then, I have learned the value of peace, and ceased to desire the conversion of everyone to my own way of thinking; variety has great charms, especially in thought," said

Janet, adding, to change the subject, "my father made an early start this morning!"

"Yes, I saw him as he passed the hotel, and hailed him from the window. He is off to inspect the recent find at B——. He looked uncommonly well and fit," but Maurice did not mention that the "cute" captain had carried with him fastened beneath a parcel of sandwiches which were to be his frugal luncheon, a number of the famous *Minerva Magazine*, in which he had placed a slip of paper to mark Janet's lucubrations, and gave to Maurice with renewed injunctions as to secresy. Nor did he say that he had nearly walked to the station with the old man, and then, yielding to an irresistible attraction, strolled along the beach where Janet found him, with the vague, undefined hope of seeing her.

"He does seem very brisk and bright this summer. I believe our stay abroad—the complete change—did him a great deal of good, though he was glad to get home. I should like to ramble among the villages and

by-ways of the Alps again this Autumn; but for many reasons that is not to be thought of. Tell me," she went on, "how did you like Alec Saville? I have never remembered to tell you how grateful his mother is for all your kindness to him!"

"He is a nice young fellow, and may turn out a good useful man if he falls into good hands; but he has not much back-bone."

"I used to be very fond of Alec," said Janet thoughtfully. "His mother doted on him. I have not heard from her for some time, which surprises me!"

"She is——" began Maurice, and stopped suddenly.

Janet finished his phrase for him: "Mr. Palliser's sister! Yes! and we have always been very good friends; she is a steady if not a frequent correspondent! I must write to her!"

Then Janet contrived to lead the conversation towards Winyard's own affairs, and drew him on to talk of his hopes, his prospects, his ambitions, till he was surprised

to find how completely he had opened his mind to her. He had not spent such a delightful hour since he returned to England. In spite of his doubts and disapprobation, he found his former playfellow more fascinating than ever. Should he cast prudence and cool judgment to the winds, and try to win this sweet, sympathetic companion to journey with him through life?

This thought was exercising his brain during one of the occasional silences—quite as delightful as words—which alternated their earnest talk as they reached the edge of the wood on their way back, and met the soft westerly breeze which was blowing up. The ground sloped rather steeply down to the Beachurst Road, and commanded a fine view over the opposite shore, the walls and steeples of Kingsport, and the entrance of the bay.

"What a graceful little ship—or craft, I ought to say—that is, running before the breeze so swiftly," said Janet, pointing out a dainty, two-masted vessel that was apparently

making for the inner harbour, her snowy sails distended with a favourable wind.

"She is a yacht, I fancy," returned Maurice. "I wonder more of them do not put in here; I should think it just the place for them."

"So should I, but the owners don't seem to be of that opinion. When do you expect Mary?"

"Not till next week. Bent comes to-morrow, and I shall go to his place to keep him company—till I go to Scotland."

"Are you going to Scotland?"

"Yes, I am due in about ten days. I have promised to pay a visit to some relations of a brother officer, and then I go on to the Highlands for the twelfth."

Janet did not reply, and for the rest of the way they did not exchange many words. At the door of The Bungalow they parted company; Maurice returning to his brother-in-law's house, intending to pass the next hour in strict seclusion with Janet's first literary effort, which he had only glanced at and ascertained was entitled "Alpine Nooks

and Bypaths," and over which he intended to be severely critical.

Janet went into the dining-room, and, removing her shady hat, sat waiting for the crust of bread and glass of milk for which she had asked. She had greatly enjoyed her walk, and felt that Maurice was unusually friendly.

"I should like him to believe fully in me, before he goes back to India, but I doubt if he ever will."

She stretched out her hand and took up the paper, at which she had not yet looked. Glancing down the list of births, marriages and deaths, her eye was caught by the following, under the last head:

"On the twenty-fifth instant, at Paris, Sir Frederic C. Saville, baronet, of Cranford Grange."

"This accounts for Gertrude's silence!" exclaimed Janet, half aloud. "How strange it will seem to have lost her occupation of

nursing and caring for him. I really think she was growing fond of him again, since he was so dependent on her. What a strange thing the heart is!"

She sat lost in thought, recalling all the bits of personal history which from time to time Lady Saville had half-unconsciously dropped; she had evidently had a trying life, but she had had two boys who loved her dearly.

"I must write to her this afternoon," was Janet's final decision, as she slowly swallowed her milk, and rising, went to the drawing-room, where she ended an idle morning by playing dreamily on the piano, while she recalled her first meetings with her former sister-in-law and all that followed.

* * * * *

Some hours later, when the breeze had dropped and the afternoon sun blazed fiercely on the sea, Janet, having finished her letter to Lady Saville, settled herself with a book to await her father, and restore her usual mental tone, which had been a great deal disturbed by her ramble and reflections. She

had hardly succeeded in fastening her attention on the page before her when "General" Brown opened the door, and said:

"Here's a gentleman for you, 'm."

Whereupon Darrell entered, in a yachting get-up, tanned a deep red brown by wind and sun, looking big and bony as ever.

Janet was truly glad to see him.

"Lord Darrell! I am delighted to see you," she exclaimed cordially, rising and holding out her hand. "Where have you come from? I thought you were in Norway."

"I have just come from Norway, but last from the yacht; we came to anchor just outside the fort this morning."

He looked earnestly, searchingly at her, his good-humoured face growing serious as he gazed.

"Then I fancy I saw it sailing in, some time near eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, we rounded the point out there about ten thirty. And how is Captain Rowley?"

"Remarkably well, but not at home. I expect him within an hour or so."

Janet resumed her seat, and Darrell drew a chair at the other side of her little work-table.

"And you are all right? My mother charged me to send her a full, true, and particular account of you; now, it seems to me you don't look as 'fit' as you did in Florence last autumn."

"I am perfectly well, however, only summer heat often withers one's roses."

"How do you stand the monotony of a place like this?"

"I do not find it monotonous. Peace is still beautiful and new. I am really quite happy!"

"And your peace quite unruffled?" asked Darrell significantly, with a searching look into her eyes.

"Yes," she returned quietly and thoughtfully. "I understand why you ask, but I *have* been quite unruffled."

"You must not think me impertinent, Mrs.

Rowley! My mother charged me to ascertain your state of mind, and, being rather tactless, I am reduced to ask straight out."

"There is no reason why you should not. You and Lady Darrell have been so—so very good to me," her voice trembled just a very little, "that I always feel your wish to know anything about me simply an indication of friendship."

"It is so, I assure you. I wish you would go and stay with my mother—she enjoys having you with her."

"Not at present, Lord Darrell! I really am reluctant to leave my father—he is so happy now; he seems quite reconciled to have me with him."

"I should think he was!" cried Darrell, laughing. "Your presence, I imagine, is not difficult to endure."

Janet smiled gravely.

"But you can understand it was a great trial to him at first; it was a constant reminder of the great trouble I had brought upon him. It was impossible to make him

understand why the idea of again binding myself to Mr. Palliser was intolerable to me. Now, whether much cogitation has opened his mind to my reason, or habit has accustomed him to seeing me at his side, he does not seem to worry himself—this is a great comfort to me." She paused, and then continued: "When Mr. Palliser marries, the past will be irrevocable, and the whole story more quickly forgotten. You and your mother are the only friends I can speak to frankly on this subject, so I cannot resist indulging in a confidential talk."

"A talk which always interests me!" exclaimed Darrell. "I always believed you were a plucky woman, though your patience with Palliser sometimes made me doubt it. I fancy I was about the first who perceived the crumples in your rose leaves."

"Oh! how cruel those first shadows and doubts were!" said Janet, interlacing her fingers with a gesture of pain and then resting them on her knee. "No words of mine could convey the steady growth of

bitter despair, that for the time seemed to crush out all of life, except the mere mechanism of animal existence. Looking back to what I was then, and what I am now, I can hardly believe that my soul could have recovered its vitality so soon. I am really very happy, Lord Darrell."

"I am most truly glad to hear you say so," he returned cordially, while his eyes dwelt with grave interest on her face, "yet I should like to see you look a little more robust. You made a bold stroke for peace and liberty, certainly, but I suspect, Mrs. Rowley, if the crisis had come a few years later, you would have been too accustomed to your surroundings, too inured to the atmosphere of cold indifference in which you lived, to have broken away. Good God! what an extraordinary fellow Palliser must be to have willingly loosened his hold on you."

"He ceased to care for me, you see, and I hardly hold him responsible for the results. He was only a lover, never a friend!"

"And you think there is no staying power, except in friendship?"

"No! only in friendship."

"I fancy you are right! Without a substratum of real friendship the effervescence of what is called love soon passes away," returned Darrell, looking down thoughtfully.

"I never can quite explain my motives to anyone, save yourself and Lady Darrell," resumed Janet, "for I cannot be so disloyal to the man whose name I bore, to describe how he broke my heart, but I well know how greatly I am misunderstood. There is an old friend of mine here now, an old playfellow, Captain Winyard, and I can see that he thinks me—well, an unprincipled woman. This wounds me, perhaps too much, and I can say nothing."

"What a prig the fellow must be!" ejaculated Darrell. "Fancy playing pride with a woman like you!"

"Why not?" asked Janet smiling, "what has my personality to do with the justice of the question?"

"There is no justice in it, as it happens! All the same, personality affects everything."

"It ought not," Janet was beginning when the door opened, and Captain Rowley, looking very hot and tired, walked in.

"Hey! Lord Darrell!" he exclaimed, brightening up at the sight of the visitor, "I thought you were away in the Arctic seas."

They shook hands heartily, and plunged into cordial talk, while Janet went quickly away and soon returned with brandy, soda water, and some small nuggets of ice, to refresh her father, who she saw was greatly tired.

She found him and Darrell talking of Sir Frederic Saville's death, which Darrell had only heard of since he had anchored off Kingsport.

"It must have been rather sudden," said Darrell, "for my mother's letters, which I found at Dover, spoke of his being better. My aunt will feel his death a good deal. She is a very emotional woman."

"Yes, yes! she is full of good feeling—I hope affairs will turn out in pretty good order."

"So do I, though I hope more than I expect. Now, Captain Rowley, will you and your daughter come and lunch with me to-morrow? I want you to look over the yacht"—to Janet: "she is a new acquisition, not the one you once honoured with your presence. We'll take a little cruise in the afternoon, round the point and along the coast. I'd like to know what you think of my craft!"

"Never say it again—I'm your man, and I am sure Janet will enjoy the trip."

"Then I will say good-bye for the present. I must write some letters for the post."

CHAPTER VI.

A GALLANT ROVER.

Lady Saville was herself surprised at the sharp sorrow with which she mourned for her husband. Memory wafted her back over the bitter years of wrong and neglect to bright days of love and pleasure, when change seemed impossible, and life's barometer only pointed to set fair. She saw him only as the handsome debonair love of her youth, and forgot how wounded pride and angry pain had nearly hurried her over a precipice which would have separated her from her boys for ever. Her reply to Janet's affectionate and sympathetic letter was written in so heart-broken a tone that it somewhat surprised its reader, remembering as she did, many of Lady Saville's sayings anent her husband. She had, however, by

this time, seen enough of human inconsistency to acknowledge that there was nothing in the newly-made widow's grief so astonishing after all.

"You will now understand," Lady Saville continued after a long and eloquent outpouring of her grief, "why I did not write to you immediately on hearing of Randal's sudden and heartless intention of marrying. I had always a dim hope, that by a display of proper feeling and some perseverance, he might yet have won you back. But he is an extraordinary mixture! I scarcely know the girl he has chosen, or rather who has chosen him, but I have met her once or twice. She is pretty certainly, and good style, but a spoiled doll, an idol with her father, and, I imagine, very self-willed. I don't know how it will affect *you*, dear—in your place I should go wild, but we are very different in disposition. I believe they (Randal and Miss de Courcy) are to be married next month. I do not suppose the sad loss *I* have sustained will be allowed to

interfere with the wedding. It is all very revolting—I am quite too prostrate to travel at present, but next week I hope to be in London, and as soon as Randal is safe out of the way, you must come and stay with me, It would do me good to talk to you and discuss plans—at present, I am incapable of making any; life seems over for me. My beloved Alec's absence too, is such an aggravation! When I am in town it would be a comfort to me if Captain Winyard would call and tell me all about my boy. *You* are fortunate in having a dear old father to live with, but *I* am utterly alone! Fred is so taken up with Oxford, his theological studies and ecclesiastical history, that he does not care a straw for anything else. My kind love to Captain Rowley, I am sure he feels for me!

"Ever your affectionate but sorrowing,

"G. SAVILLE."

This epistle reached Janet nearly a fortnight after she had sent hers to the mourning

widow, a fortnight which had cheered and amused her. The *Sea Mew* was still at Kingsport, and Captain Rowley greatly enjoyed an occasional cruise with her good-humoured, easy-going owner. In these Janet sometimes accompanied him, but she never neglected her work for this indulgence.

When the day after his delightful walk with Janet through the woods, Maurice called at the Bungalow, he was thrilled with a sudden chill sense of uneasiness as Mrs. Brown informed him that "the missus was out, and wouldn't be back much before dinner-time. She had gone with master a-sailing in his lordship's yacht."

"Yacht?" exclaimed Winyard, "what yacht?"

"I dunno, sir; but my lord is Lord Darrell."

"Lord Darrell!" repeated Winyard, whose brain became immediately occupied in the mystic operation of putting two and two together. "Tell your mistress I called, and say that Mr. Bent returned this morning!"

"Yes, sir!"

Winyard walked away to the club, feeling as if he had been rubbed the wrong way. There he found the few members who were lounging over the papers and magazines, a good deal occupied about the yacht, the arrival of which at that dead season was rather an event.

"Didn't she win the cup at Cowes last year?" asked a plump, sharp-looking military surgeon.

"No," returned a naval officer, "I don't think Lord Darrell does much at regattas. This is a new vessel. I remember when Henderson—that young plunger, you know—bought the *Southern Star*, Darrell's other yacht. He's a crack shot as well as a rather salt sailor!"

"I met him just now—at least I fancy it must have been him — walking with old Captain Rowley towards the pier. I fancy they were going off to the yacht."

"By the way, do you ever see Rowley's daughter?"

"No, she rarely shows up—deuced elegant-looking woman. I wonder why she cut Palliser?"

"I say, here's Winyard! Ah, Winyard! you know Captain Rowley very well, don't you?"

"I have known him all my life."

"Well, is Lord Darrell any relative of his?"

"Not that I know of."

"I have just met them going down to the pier together, and it's running in my head that they are related!"

While the rest babbled, Winyard took up the *Times* and screened himself behind its friendly shelter.

What was Lord Darrell like?—he asked himself—and how old was he? Could he be the favoured lover for whom Janet had deserted her husband, as she ought to have considered him? The mother was her great friend—Janet often spoke of her—and of their familiar intercourse in Florence! Had Darrell been there too—had they laid their plans together there?

Did he come now, because Palliser's approaching marriage gave his former wife a certain liberty? It seemed almost indecent that a woman should think of another husband while her first one was alive. That the husband should do so was another matter, and did not shock Maurice at all; but a woman — one expected a different standard from a woman! Then conscience reminded him that only yesterday he dreamed of winning her love, of securing her life-long companionship. Then he was quite different. He was—or ought to have been — the love of her youth, and — but would she be true? Might she not find that according to her standard, he was negligent, cold, unkind, and leave him for some other fellow who might flatter her vanity more satisfactorily? No—there was truth and loyalty in her eyes! Why, in the old days, he would have trusted his life to her lightest word! Now!—he could never quite trust her again, never? Never—as old wiseacres say—is a long word!

He would like to see Darrell and Janet together, he fancied he should be able to tell at a glance if Darrell *was* her lover. But how should he see them together? Perhaps the yacht would sail away to-morrow! There was nothing to keep a man of Darrell's character and position at Beachurst—except Janet herself!

That evening as the brothers-in-law sat over their wine, came a note addressed to Captain Winyard which, long though it was since he had seen the writing, thrilled the recipient with a certain eagerness to know the contents.

"Dear Maurice," he read, "can you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner to-morrow at seven-thirty? If Mr. Bent has returned pray beg of him to come also! Lord Darrell is here for a few days, and would very much like to meet you, as Alec Saville has so often mentioned you in his letters.

"Yours very truly,

"JANET ROWLEY."

Winyard's eyes dwelt searchingly on the signature, but he could find no sign of hesitation in the clear, firm, but by no means pretty caligraphy.

"There," he said, handing the missive over to his host, "shall we go?"

"Yes, by all means!" he returned, when he had glanced over the page. "I fancy Lady Darrell has stuck to Janet like a brick, and such friendship is of great value to a woman in her very doubtful position. Gad! it must feel strange to her signing her old name! She certainly has the courage of her opinions, but I can't help liking her. There is something uncommonly straightforward about her!"

"She has placed herself in a terribly false position," said Maurice, "no one will believe that she was not actuated by some dubious motive."

"Very likely," returned Bent. "I confess *I* have no such suspicions now, at first I was a good deal puzzled. I suppose Mary's liking for her and faith in her has influenced

me. All the same, it was a disastrous step for a woman to take, and a tremendous come-down from Mervyn Hall, to a struggle to make both ends meet in her father's cottage!"

"I don't think she minds that, she is a curious creature altogether," and Winyard dropped the subject.

He was very glad of the unexpected chance of seeing Darrell in Janet's presence — but it did not occur to him that his suspicious and quick-growing jealousy unfitted him to be a clear-eyed judge of what he wanted to observe.

"I remember some years ago, when Darrell came of age, one used to see his name pretty often in the papers connected with sporting events. He was a great steeple-chase rider, and a mighty hunter—in fact, 'went the pace' considerably—now I am told he goes in for farming and cattle-breeding."

"He is a nephew of Sir Frederick Saville, isn't he? I suppose that's the connection with the Rowleys?"

"It is! Well—write your note, Maurice, and I'll send it round."

* * * * *

When Winyard and his brother-in-law reached the Bungalow the following evening they found Lord Darrell already arrived and looking his best, as men accustomed to it generally do, in evening dress — he was lounging in a deep easy chair beside the sofa where Janet sat. She wore a black dress of some gauzy silk material, made in demi-toilet fashion, with a good deal of fine black lace about the neck and sleeves. She had evidently been conversing with interest, and the glow of animation still brightened her expressive eyes.

"Very glad to have an opportunity of meeting you," said Darrell, shaking hands with Winyard, "we all heard a good deal of you about the time of that Hill fort business, but my young cousin Saville has kept up the interest ever since he saw you! I am sure we are all indebted to you for your great kindness and care of Alec."

Maurice bowed.

"My aunt will, I know, be delighted to have a talk with you as soon as the first days of her mourning are over. I fancy"—to Janet—"she will be in London next week—I shall not go up to Yorkshire until I see her. I believe she is awfully cut up."

"Her letter to me was very sad," said Janet.

"She was all alone, too," resumed Darrell, "death came very suddenly at the last. Her eldest boy in India—her brother, well, otherwise engaged—I myself watching the midnight sun. Lady Saville is not exactly what one could describe as a woman of much moral force."

"She is very kind and charming," said Janet thoughtfully.

"No doubt, one of the most charming women I ever met."

Here dinner was announced, and Darrell offered his arm to the hostess. It was quite natural and proper, but it seemed to Maurice that he presumed upon his rank. At table

the talk turned on India, and Winyard was gradually drawn to speak of that country. His experiences evidently interested Lord Darrell; then they wandered to tiger-shooting, and thence to the prospects of sport in the now near-at-hand shooting season.

"I hope you will come and try our country next month," said Darrell, turning to Maurice. "There is a wide stretch of moorland within a couple of miles of my place—you know it, Mrs. Rowley—just at the other side of the river; I am told the birds are plentiful and healthy. I should be very pleased to introduce you to my mother—suppose you and Captain Rowley join us?" to Janet. "I expect a good many men after the twenty-second—when my mother goes south, but till then it shall be as small a party as you like. If your old friend, Captain Winyard, comes it may be an inducement."

"You are very good, Lord Darrell," she returned with a smile and shake of her head, "but that cannot be."

"Are you going to cut us all for ever and a day?"

"Oh, no! I hope to indulge myself in a little visit to your mother when she is in Devonshire."

"Thank you," said Winyard. "I am afraid I am engaged for all August and part of September, or I should gladly avail myself of your hospitality."

"Well, I shall be at Woodlands till the end of September and if you can give me a week or two at any time, send me a line, and come along."

Winyard repeated his thanks, while he confessed to himself that Darrel's frank civility and apparent wish for his (Winyard's) society looked exceedingly unlike the sort of jealous unfriendliness which would be natural in an unavowed lover towards a man who had the advantage of early intimacy, the position of an old playfellow.

His keen watchfulness prevented Maurice from enjoying the sociable little dinner as his *convives* did. Captain Rowley was unusually

bright; to entertain his friends was always a joy to him, and in spite of the shock he had sustained when Janet refused to return to Palliser, the happiness and comfort of her companionship had revived and invigorated him. He told several anecdotes illustrative of life afloat in his early days, and discussed the great changes which had almost metamorphosed the service in a wonderfully liberal spirit. Mr. Bent's dockyard experiences furnished some curious observations on the character of the British artisan, and Lord Darrell added his quota to the general fund of conversation from the variety of his travels in foreign parts. After dinner, the gentlemen indulged in a game of whist, while Janet, knitting in hand, watched the game, and occasionally joined in the arguments which arose about a disputed point.

But with all his suspicious vigilance, Maurice could detect nothing more than frank, unembarrassed friendliness in the speech, manner and looks of Darrell, nor was Janet in the slightest degree different

from her ordinary composed self, and how delightful her composure was with its occasional sparkle of animation when something touched her. No, it was impossible that a man who was in love could so guard eyes and voice. Maurice well knew the task it was to keep his own gaze averted from the fair, earnest face, the graceful, pliant figure—every line of which filled him with unspeakable delight—the deft, white hands he longed to kiss, the dark, speaking eyes, in which at times he would give half his life to read responsive tenderness. No, there was certainly no trace of a lover about Darrell; his manner, though well bred, had a certain bluffness, which suggested candour and inability to conceal his real feelings or impressions. As to Janet, why, women could mask their batteries or mines, better. Still, it was annoying to observe how many memories and what a number of acquaintances they had in common, and how well they amused themselves discussing people and things he (Maurice) had never heard of.

There was a degree of mutual understanding between them evidently; it "riled" him, too, to hear him call her "Mrs. Rowley" so glibly and unblushingly, and she did not mind it a bit. What unaccountable creatures women were! One effect of this trying encounter was to show him what a helpless condition he was in himself.

"It won't do," he thought. "I fancied I was safeguarded by the grave doubts her conduct has aroused, but I did not know the depth or height of my own folly: I must get away! my only safety is in flight! Darrell may not be the lover, but could it be possible that any woman would desert a fairly good husband—for no one ever accused Palliser of brutality or infidelity—and a luxurious home from any motive less than love for another man? What else could give a woman the strength and force to choose the revolting position of an unwedded wife? I will retreat while I can."

"I must say good-bye for the present as well as good-night," was his valediction. "I

have some business in Town and shall go on to Scotland for my long-promised visit."

"Before your sister returns?"

"Oh, I shall see her again before Christmas."

"Well, my father and I are going to treat ourselves to a little change, after the roasting we have had here. We are going for a week to Edgefield; my father says it is cool and shady and delighfully rural there."

"Yes, I fancy it is. Good-night."

"Pray, remember to take Woodlands on your way back," said Darrell, shaking hands with him cordially.

A few words at parting with Bent, respecting the return of his wife and children, and Janet was left alone with Darrell, her father having gone to the gate to speed the parting guests.

"He's a nice young fellow—Winyard, I mean," said Darrell, following Janet, who had stepped out on the balcony.

"You speak as if you were old enough to be his father," she returned, smiling.

"He must be ten years my junior—how old is he?"

"About twenty-seven, I think."

"Just so. It is quite natural that I should take a fatherly interest in him. He'll be a stern commander as the years go on; there's a dash of the Puritan in him, I fancy, a sort of fellow who'll put his trust in God, but take right good care to 'keep his powder dry,' all the same. He's of the sort that conquers new realms coolly for England, in the way of duty! You must have quarrelled pretty often in the days of your early friendship."

"Why do you think so?"

"There's a certain antagonism of nature between you; you are too free and independent a member for so determined a character as Winyard, if my hasty judgment is right."

"Maurice Winyard is greatly changed," said Janet, as if to herself, resting her arms on the railing of the verandah and gazing on the water, which looked, in the moonlight,

like a sheet of rippled silver. "He used to be so even-tempered and kind."

"I don't suppose he is unkind now, and I'll swear he is not hard-hearted, but he has rubbed shoulders with rough realities, and the sudden demands of a dangerous emergency have developed the power that lay dormant in him. He'll rise high in his profession if he lives, but he has a strong dash of the Puritan. You have a delightful look-out here," he continued. "It's a nice little place, but don't bury yourself here too long! The more you avoid the world, the more formidable the world will appear. Why should you avoid Society?—Society will be deuced glad to have you."

"I am very happy here, Lord Darrell, and do not despise me—I dread society. I do not like to encounter cold looks, and clear as I feel my conscience—conscience is not always a steadfast backer."

"This will not do, Mrs. Rowley. You must go and stay with my mother and listen to the words of wisdom from her lips."

"I will gladly, but many things conspire to make me prefer retirement; here is my father, I can say no more."

"Lovely night," ejaculated Captain Rowley. "A tinge more yellow in the moonlight and one might fancy oneself in Sicily."

"And you are going to rusticate for a few days?" asked Lord Darrell, offering his cigar case to the old sailor. "Where is your intended retreat?"

"Oh! a little village or hamlet some ten miles off, where they found the remains of a Roman villa about two years ago. They have been excavating at intervals ever since, and it is something to look at—a sort of idle occupation."

"I'll come and have a look myself, as soon as I have put my yacht out of commission. I am not due at Woodlands till next week. Shall we run up to Weymouth to-morrow, Captain Rowley? I think you enjoy being afloat."

"I confess I do."

"Then what hour shall we start?" Darrell asked, addressing Janet.

"I am sorry I cannot join you. I have a variety of things to do and must not play truant."

From this, Darrell could not move her, though he used many ingenious arguments, and so having agreed that Captain Rowley should report himself at noon as "come on board," Darrell bid his entertainer a cordial good-night.

CHAPTER VII.

A LAST MEETING.

On the whole, Winyard's absence was a relief to Janet. She felt, rather than perceived, that he distrusted her, that a perpetual struggle went on in his heart between liking and disliking as regarded herself, only she did not perceive how strong the *liking* was. But this recognition kept him much in her thoughts, and she often wished she could place a picture of her married life, its agony long drawn out, its utter disenchantment, before his eyes. Even if she could, was he the sort of man to understand the suffering she had borne?—could any man understand it? It surprised her to find so strong a desire in her innermost heart to right herself with her early admirer. How nice he was with his sister, how tender and delightful with his sister's children. For

herself, however, the only course possible for self-respect was silence.

There was nothing then to disturb the quiet pleasure of her stay at the little hamlet adjoining the lately-discovered ruins; she roamed about them all day, sometimes jotting down notes, oftener storing her mind with pictures. Lord Darrell joined them after two or three days, and remained while they did. His presence rather disturbed her, as it was rather embarrassing to take notes under his observant eyes; but this passed over soon, as he quickly swept away the curtain of reserve she strove to keep drawn over her work.

"Are you preparing an exhaustive volume on these interesting remains?" he asked one evening when he had followed her to a favourite point of view; she sat on a fragment of the low wall that had surrounded the enclosure or garden which sloped gently down to the west. Behind her were the walls of the public rooms whose tesselated floors were in wonderful preservation. These walls were

but breast high, having in the opinion of experts been the base of a wooden superstructure; behind these again rose a mass of foliage, as the upland on which the villa stood was thickly clothed with trees, chiefly by oaks.

In front, the wood swept away right and left, opening to a wide green valley through which a rivulet wandered, spreading in one part into a shallow pool, where some cattle were standing in luxurious stillness against a sunset sky of exquisite tints, and still aglow with living light. "I see you are 'a chiel takin' notes,'" he added.

"I wish I could paint, but it would take a wonderful artist to reproduce *that*," pointing to the sky.

"It would," he returned, "and if he succeeded, he would probably find his reward in the critics' assurance that such a sunset was utterly unnatural."

"Perhaps it would look so on canvas," said Janet, putting up her note-book.

"I hope yours on paper will be more suc-

cessful. It is really very unfriendly of you to conceal your literary performances from me. It is useless too! Do you think me such a mere bovine country gentleman as to read the brilliant pages of the *Minerva Magazine*, especially those devoted to 'Alpine Nooks and By-paths,' without adding the title to the signature 'Ira,' and by working an abstruse problem, come to the satisfactory conclusion that they were written by a lady who honours me with a few crumbs of friendship?"

"I think you must be gifted with second sight," said Janet laughing, yet annoyed. "How came you to suspect me?"

"Your intimacy with that somewhat crabbed editor who ought to be Orson, not Valentine, and the fact that the places described in those *Minerva* papers, are those mentioned in your letters to my mother which she told me about, and sometimes read to me. I don't think it would take a wizard to divine the facts."

"Well, say nothing about it, Lord Darrell—

but that is an absurd speech. I have passed out of sight, and Society need know me no more?"

"You don't suppose I am a blab, do you? I can be extremely 'mum' if necessary. But do not imagine you have done with Society. Why, by far the biggest half of your life lies before you, and you like society. You are far too healthy in every way to be troubled about the 'hollowness of life,' or disgusted with the insincerity of the world. There's a lot of good in both, if you are only magnetic enough to attract it, and I fancy *you* are. There's my mother, and, if you will not laugh at my partiality, there are very few women like her, she has taken to you as I have never known her take to any one outside her own people and to very few of them! You really must pay her a visit, it is a kindness!"

"And an immense pleasure to me," said Janet gratefully. "I do not know any one whose conversation I enjoy so much!"

"Then do not deny yourself that pleasure," he paused. "I left Captain Rowley enjoying

a snooze," resumed Darrell. "I am afraid I took him too far, we must have done five or six miles to-day."

"I think he is quite equal to that—I am afraid he does not get enough exercise. He stands about a great deal in his garden and poultry-yard, but I am not disposed for such long walks, except in autumn or winter."

"Well, all I know is that your father looks ten years younger than when I last saw him at Mervyn Hall—how long ago? Perhaps I ought not to talk about those bygone days."

Janet was silent for a minute.

"I do not mind hearing them mentioned," she said. "Is it obtuseness, or want of delicacy?—Mervyn and all connected with it have passed out of my life so completely. I went through such deep waters of affliction, that rising at last above them, I have found new heavens and a new earth, though I have lost a few treasures in the flood!"

"Yes! I suppose you haven't much faith left in men?"

"No! Have I not seen plenty of good men? There is my father and the vicar, and Mr. Bent, not to mention Maurice and yourself, Lord Darrell."

"Thank you; as to Winyard, he might be irreproachable, yet *not* an agreeable husband!"

"You don't know how nice he is to the women he likes *and* respects."

"Ha!" exclaimed Darrell, darting a quick, enquiring glance at her. "Yes, the Puritan comes in there!"

"How do you know you would be a good husband yourself, Lord Darrell? It seems to me a tremendous test, the relationship of men and women in holy matrimony; excellent people in other respects often fail as husbands and wives."

"I think," said Darrell with much gravity, "that I should make an admirable husband! I am not inclined to fall in love, not since I was six-and-twenty, up to which time I had several bad attacks. Now I am almost sure, that the worst beginning of

matrimony a man can make is to be in love with his wife!"

"Perhaps so," returned Janet laughing, "only it must be nearly impossible to make up one's mind to such a tremendous leap in the dark, if you have not the wildfire of love to drive you over the precipice!"

"You must write a thrilling novel next, Mrs. Rowley. With your experience you ought to manage splendidly, though it is highly audacious in a mere ignoramus like myself to attempt criticism. I must venture to say that I have noticed an enormous improvement between the first of your Alpine papers, and those you have written since."

"I am glad you think so, for I am inclined to believe what you say, nor are you so unlearned as you affect to be."

A short silence ensued, both were gazing at the sleepy loveliness of the wide valley before them, the changing glories of the sunset.

Then Janet said softly, "Can't you fancy the sensation of rest and refreshment with which the general in command or the pro-

consul, or whoever the big man was at Torchester in its Roman day, rode away from the heat and harassment of the camp, to this delightful retreat, perhaps in the cool of the evening along the river side there? I suppose the face of the country is still much the same as at that time—perhaps he had a bright daughter, or a sweet wife to stroll out and meet him?"

"Perhaps," returned Darrell, "after having seen to the flogging of her Syrian, or Lybian, or anything-ian slave, for not having done her hair to a turn, or laid the colour on her cheek with sufficiently delicate skill."

"I suppose some Roman women were not cruel?"

"The exceptions are not mentioned," he returned laughing.

"Really, Lord Darrell, I am glad I have not your classic lore, if its effect is to make one sceptical. Come! I had better return to my father."

"By all means. We shall probably find him smoking the pipe of peace!"

"The evening has an hour more of light and beauty—don't think it necessary to return with me!"

"It may not be necessary, but I prefer talking with you to communing with my own heart. My own heart is a rather uncommunicative party, and by no means given to evolve profound truths out of its inner consciousness."

"Very well," said Janet, and they walked on together.

"I have been so absorbed in our philosophic talk, that I forgot to tell you Lady Saville is expected in town to-day. I had a letter from my man of business, who is also the Saville's, and he says my aunt wants to see me as I pass through town, so I shall say adieu to you and to this pretty spot to-morrow evening. I shall try and persuade Lady Saville to come with me to Woodlands. It is too ghastly to stay in London in August. I fancy she has a good deal to attend to."

"No doubt! I should like to see her again. Her life has not been all sunshine."

"I suspect not—in fact, her rose leaves have been pretty considerably crumpled."

The day but one after this conversation, Captain Rowley and his daughter returned home refreshed and embrowned, and Janet set to work on her paper for the friendly editor while her impressions were fresh, and had nearly accomplished the due amount of copy, when the letter she rather expected from Lady Saville reached her.

"I have been so busy and worried," it ran, "that I could not write to you before. Now—this is not a letter, only a prayer. Do be compassionate, come and bear me company for a few days—I am so wretchedly lonely, and no one could do me so much good as yourself. I would not ask you, if there was the slightest chance of any awkward meeting, but there is not the least probability of such a *contretemps*, so be a true friend and come to me."

"I can hardly refuse," said Janet, when she

saw her father had finished reading Lady Saville's letter.

"No, certainly not, you might go up on Monday, and I think I'll follow you on Saturday. I want to——" he paused.

"What do you want, dear Dad?"

He still hesitated.

"The truth is, I want to see Tom!" he broke out at last. "It is too unnatural this estrangement, and deucedly unfair to you. I have hoped and hoped he would make the first advance, but as he has not, I think I will just speak to him face to face, and as the wife will most probably be out of town, he'll be left to himself, and more likely to hear reason."

"You must do what you think best, father. I am sorry and disappointed that Tom had so little faith in me, but I fancy he has the majority on his side, in thinking me very reprehensible for taking the chance of freedom when it offered. I should be glad if you and he were friends again, and pray remember I have never quarrelled with him."

"You are very forgiving, my pet."

"It is easy to forgive what does not hurt one much," said Janet, with a sigh. "It is curious how few people or things affect me now; I look on the outside world through glasses which diminish rather than magnify—I am certainly old of my years."

"Don't talk like that, dear child! I do not like to hear it. I am pretty sure that you endured more than anyone knows before you were driven to such a step, but Tom has been influenced by his wife —a damned, tuft-hunting, underbred plebeian, by George!"

"She seems to make Tom very comfortable, so leave her alone, dear."

"Well, anyway I will go up to Town, and see what I can do with him; I should like to have a talk with Lady Saville, too—she is a very charming woman."

"And Lady Saville will be very pleased to see you."

"Then I can bring you back with me. I don't much care for the house without you,

Janet! You are more in it than you ever were before."

"Why, dad! I ought to be, considering my years and vast experience," she returned, with a smile which touched the father's heart with pitying tenderness. "I shall write at once to Lady Saville. Two days more will quite finish my *Minerva* paper. I must go and see Mr. Valentine while I am in Town, that is, if he is not away."

* * * * *

It was strange to find herself in London, Janet thought, as she drove from Waterloo Bridge, through streets that, to her unaccustomed eye, seemed endless, to the private hotel in Half Moon Street, where Lady Saville put up. It was nearly two years and a half since she had been in the mighty city, and the sight of the once familiar thoroughfares brought the past vividly before her; the joy and gladness of her return there, after her wedding journey, the awe and excitement of her presentation, the ineffable delight of perceiving that her husband was satisfied with

the effect she produced, and then—London was never the same to her again. The bitter breath of doubt, of self-distrust, gradually frosted over the warm stream of her happy life till her very soul was numb with despair, and when the irrepressible vitality of a strong, healthy nature brought it back to conscious existence—how cold, and hard, and wearisome everything seemed. How hard she herself was growing before deliverance came—now, thank God! she was gentler, more forgiving, more human. But how hard her fate had been! How cruelly she had been punished—and for what?

Lady Saville flew to meet her guest with flattering warmth.

"It is so very, very good of you to come! You will be such a comfort to me. You cannot fancy a more desolate creature than I am—my occupation is gone. Latterly, my poor, dear husband could not bear me out of his sight; it was gratifying, but most fatiguing! You are looking very well, Janet—thinner and paler than you used to be, but

looking much better than I expected. Now, I am a wreck—oh, yes, I know I am."

"You are not, Lady Saville," returned Janet firmly. "You are pale, too, but your eyes are as bright as ever, and your mourning makes you look interesting, not ill."

"Do you really think so? Well, I do hope I am not a fright. But why Lady Saville?—I am Gertrude to you always, dear. Now come to your room. Dinner will be ready directly. We shall be quite *tête-à-tête;* even if I wished to ask anyone, there is no one in Town to ask. Darrell was here last week, and cheered me a little—he is a very good fellow! He was quite vexed you did not come up before; he was obliged to return home on Saturday. How wonderfully you seem to get on with his mother! She is rather a difficult woman—at least, she never liked me—but you get on with everyone."

Janet smiled a somewhat sad smile, and shook her head.

"Ah! yes, I know what you mean—but that is quite different!" with which enig-

matical phrase Lady Saville left her to her toilette.

With a curious, dazed feeling Janet descended to dinner. To be with Palliser's sister seemed like a restoration to her old life; it made her a little nervous, with an unreasoning fear that other forms from the past might come out of cloudland, and stand out before her. Lady Saville was comparatively silent during dinner; she complained of the wretched loneliness of London in August and its depressing effect, as if it were a positive evil, but when they went to the little drawing-room, because it was cooler and fresher, to take their coffee, and they were alone, she launched forth into a history of her husband's last illness, of her own fatigues and sufferings, and of the wonderful manner in which he had clung to her in his hours of failing life; she wept freely, unrestrainedly, and though somewhat feebly voluble, her emotion woke Janet's sympathy and respect, for there was real kindness of heart at the bottom of it.

Evening had closed in, and the lamps were lit before Lady Saville had finished her review of the last three months.

"You can fancy how desolate I am," she resumed, after a brief pause. "There seems nothing to do, nothing to live for! I am sure if my poor, dear husband had been spared—and, you know, he was not quite fifty-five—he would have been a different man—at least, I think so! Now, I do not know what to do, where to live, or—anything. I sometimes think I shall have Fred to live with me, and settle at Oxford, but I do not think he would like it; he is tremendously good, and desperately theological—worries about how many angels can dance on the point of a needle and that sort of thing! As to my brother—oh! speaking of him, I forgot to say the reason I was so sure you need not fear meeting him is that—now you are quite sure you will not mind what I am going to say?"

"How can I tell until I know what it is?" said Janet, laughing.

"Of course, it is about Randal. Well, he

went over to Paris last Wednesday—to make arrangements. The de Courcys have been somewhere—Denmark, I think—and they are to meet and have the marriage very quietly in Paris. You see, either in the country or in London there must be some publicity about it—and it is to take place next week."

"Indeed! Then there can be very little danger of meeting him here," said Janet, simply.

"And you really don't mind—not at all? You are a wonderful creature, Janet! Then I may say that he—Randal, is very much taken with Miss de Courcy—she is quite wild about him."

"I trust she may continue to please him," observed Janet with a quick sigh, "for her own sake as well as his."

"So do I. But do you know I don't think Randal is nearly so far gone as he was about you!"

"So much the better for Miss de Courcy, perhaps."

"Perhaps!" echoed Lady Saville, and then

exclaimed, "Good Heavens, Janet, what an extraordinary position you have placed yourself in. I sometimes wonder whether you are wise and brave—or unutterably foolish! You have thrown away a great deal; you and Randal would have grown used to live on terms of distant civility, and you were fast making such a good social position for yourself, now you *must* often be dull and moped."

"Yes, a few years, and I should no doubt have hardened into habitual indifference, but, Gertrude, believe me, I am not only a happier, but a better woman since I gained my freedom."

"At all events you are an uncommon one."

Next day Lady Saville had an appointment with her solicitor, and this reminded her of many matters, of which she had much to say. Things were better than she expected; almost all the late Sir Frederic's debts had been paid, for when the eldest son came of age he had joined his father in cutting the entail, whereby they were enabled to sell some property in the neighbourhood of a

big manufacturing town, which fetched a good price, and materially assisted in clearing the estate.

"So my jointure is quite safe, you see, and so is Fred's portion, while dear Alec, by the time he returns from India, will be able to live in the old place again," concluded Lady Saville.

The time hung somewhat heavily on their hands. There was literally nothing to do. The shops were unattractive, and the heads of departments in the great millinery and dress-making establishments were like their customers — out of Town. But drives in Richmond Park and over Hampstead Heath to the pleasant lanes that lie beyond, helped them through several of the days which Lady Saville was obliged to pass in Town, waiting the completion of some business that entailed her signature to certain papers.

Captain Rowley came up, as he proposed, and surprised his daughter by an early visit. His face on entering bespoke disappointment.

"I have had my journey for my pains," he

said. "Tom started for Scarborough last night. I was an idiot not to have ascertained whether he were at home or not. This comes of starting on a Friday."

"Never mind, my dear Captain Rowley, your company gives us a great deal of pleasure. You will spend the rest of your time with me, but you must not dream of returning on Monday! I want your advice about some matters."

"I'll give you the best my old brains can, but back I must go on Monday. I have a return ticket, my dear lady."

"That is an unanswerable argument," said Janet, smiling.

"Then, my dear sir, please do not take away Janet. It is positive cruelty to leave me in this wilderness of empty houses. I am sure you could not be so unkind. I hope to get away to Lady Darrell, in Devonshire, next week. Do let Janet stay with me till then," and of course Captain Rowley consented.

The old man was greatly cast down by

missing his son. He had set his heart upon a reconciliation between him and Janet, as it seemed a great wrong and injury to her that her only brother should so openly disapprove her parting from Palliser. Lady Saville and Janet did their best to amuse and cheer their visitor on Saturday afternoon. He was taken to see some recent additions to the Naval Museum. Sunday morning they attended service in Westminster Abbey, for the Captain loved music in a natural, uneducated manner. The afternoon was devoted to a confidential talk with Lady Saville, and the beautiful evening was given to the Botanic Gardens.

The following Tuesday Lady Saville was invited to attend at her solicitor's office to conclude the business which had detained her in Town, and when she went out Janet sat down to write letters ; one especially to Lady Darrell, to inform her of Lady Saville's movements, as the former proposed leaving Woodlands sooner than she had intended, in order to receive her widowed sister-in-law in her

seaside abode. The writing-table was near the door which opened against it, so that it was hidden from anyone entering, and Janet wrote steadily for half an hour, indulging herself in a chat on paper with her friend, when the door was suddenly opened, and a voice, not the voice of the waiter who usually attended on Lady Saville, said, "You'll find pens and paper here, sir." A gentleman entered, the door was closed. Janet started up and found herself face to face with Palliser.

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTING FOR EVER.

For an instant Palliser looked dazed, as if he doubted his senses, then he exclaimed :

"Janet! Good God!"

She too felt overwhelmed with a painful sense of being an intruder, of having placed herself in a trying and undignified position ; she was unnerved and disposed to apologise for her presence.

A flush of annoyance darkened Palliser's face, while hers grew very white. She made a strong effort and regained self-possession partially.

"I am very sorry Lady Saville is out. I think she will return in half an hour, at least, she expected to be in before one," said Janet, steadily enough. She took up the letters she had been writing, and hastily arranged fresh

paper, intending to leave the room at once. Palliser, however, stood between her and the door, gazing at her with a look in which anger and curiosity contended. Janet could not pass him without asking him to stand aside. She hesitated, but her self-possession was returning.

"This is a strange encounter," said Palliser harshly. "I never thought I should see you again."

"And I *hoped* I never should see you again," she replied, but her voice was soft and low.

Palliser laughed. "I do not suppose my presence could disturb the equanimity of a woman like you, who can coolly put aside the status of a matron and return to single blessedness after four or five years of matrimony."

"It would have disturbed me more, had I not known that you were so soon to be married—well and happily married, I trust. The greatest drawback to the blessedness of my present single state has been a fear that I

might unintentionally have injured you in the eyes of the world. Will you ever believe, Mr. Palliser, that I wished to set you free as much as I wished for freedom myself ?"

"I have never pretended to fathom your motives, but I have no doubt they will explain themselves later."

"In time you will believe what I have told you," she replied, meeting his eyes calmly, and for an instant he felt abashed by her steady gaze. "You ought to thank me for having had the courage to break the chains—chains which galled us both so cruelly. You reap more benefit from my action than I do."

"I should be more than human if I did not keenly resent the greatest affront ever put upon a man!" cried Palliser, advancing a step or two and grasping the top of a chair. His ordinary cool self-control was shattered, and Janet's quiet—her gentleness enraged him, yet he felt there was a charm about her too. "How did I deserve such treatment at your hands?" he exclaimed.

"I only tried to be just to you. Is it

possible you are unconscious of the unmistakable weariness of me which you could not conceal, of the coldness, the resentment against me as a hopeless failure? Good God, Randal!" she exclaimed with sudden fire, "my life for a while was such a torture, that when I was so ill—you remember?—I prayed —how earnestly! that I might die and be at rest. True, that mood did not last. It would have been shame if it had, nor believe me, do I now bear you any resentment. You could not help yourself. You acted according to your nature—the power to love has been denied you."

"Why, Janet? Love denied to me! I was wildly in love with you, can you forget?—wildly in love, till your want of sympathy with my dearest wishes——"

"This is all useless, this altercation, and not very dignified," said Janet. "We have nothing in common, and are parted for ever. I trust you will find you have cause to thank me for what you now resent. *I* am happy, and I sincerely wish you may be the same."

She paused a moment looking gravely, but not unkindly at him, and thinking how handsome and distinguished he was, and how deeply she regretted that the charming lover she once loved so well, had been replaced by the disappointed, selfish man who had ceased to attract, and could only be repellent to her.

While it may possibly have flashed across his mind that she was indeed fair, with a beauty that time could never quite efface, for the light which embellished it came from a true heart and a strong spirit. For a moment the sweet, sad eyes held his, then with a murmured good-bye—she passed him and left the room, feeling they had exchanged the last words that would ever pass between them.

For some minutes after she had reached her own room Janet could not think clearly, everything swam before her eyes, she sat down and covered her face with her hands, waiting for the wild beating of her heart to subside. Then she mentally went through the agitating interview from which she had

just escaped, and thanked Heaven she felt more convinced than ever that she had done well and wisely in accepting the deliverance a strange chance had thrown in her way.

She had sat long thus, living the past over again, when Lady Saville in her out-of-door garb and deep crape veil, came into the room.

"What an extraordinary occurrence!" she exclaimed. "There is indeed nothing so near at hand as what we consider improbable. I could not believe my eyes when I found Randal in the drawing-room. He was in the wildest fury with you, and me, and, I fancy, himself; yet his disturbance was not all fury. I am thankful he is gone.

"But how was it he came here?"

"Oh, the lawyers have been making some mistake which offended Lord de Courcy, so Randal started off from Paris last night to see it all put to rights. He returns to-morrow. The wedding is fixed for the seventeenth—you must have seemed like a spectre to him. It

was a most dramatic meeting. Why, Janet, you are not nearly so upset as he is. If ever you wished revenge for the bad quarters of an hour you owe him, you ought to be amply satisfied! He has been desperately mortified!"

"I never had the faintest desire for revenge, as you must know, Gertrude."

"That is the strongest proof of indifference. I wonder how Miss de Courcy feels about marrying him, when she knows you are alive?"

"She does not think about me."

"I suppose not. What an extraordinary business it has been. When Randal's marriage is announced, there will be a huge aftermath of gossip, and then it will all die away. Everything and every one is forgotten in London."

Both were silent for a few moments, then Lady Saville said:

"I think I am now quite free to leave town on Saturday, so I can release you. It has been so good of you to stay with me, dear, you

have been such a comfort. I am infinitely sorry that Randal——"

"My dear Lady Saville, I would rather not hear any more about him; the sooner we forget all about each other the better."

"I suppose you are right."

* * * * *

Janet felt a new creature when she found herself again in her father's quiet home. While in London she missed the luxuries and conveniences of her former town life—at Beachurst she forgot all about them. She felt thoroughly contented with the tranquil obscurity of her lot. In time suitable and pleasant acquaintances would gather around her, a few true friends had never failed; care, tender, attentive, cheerful companionship would prolong her dear father's days, and when in the course of nature he was taken from her, she would be old enough, established enough, to live alone; she might even have a safe footing in literature, though she never believed she could take a higher place. There was, however, an ever increasing mass

of readers, the majority of whom only cared to have their fancy tickled, so she hoped to find a market for the articles and light essays which practice made easier to her as she persevered, and subjects more frequently suggested themselves.

"You are looking quite blooming, dear dad!" she exclaimed, as they sat down to a late dinner as soon as she had removed her travelling garb after her arrival, and noticing the more than usual cheerfulness in his honest blue-grey eyes.

"I feel uncommon well, hearty as a buck! I'm ready to walk through the woods to Farley Hill with you to-morrow."

"You may be, but I do not feel equal to six miles out, and back again!" said Janet, laughing.

"No? Well, you don't look it! London has not agreed with you this time."

She did not reply beyond a little nod—she would not disturb the old man by mentioning her meeting with Palliser, not yet at least! Captain Rowley went on:

"The fact is, I have had a capital tonic in the shape of a very sensible, straightforward letter from Tom. He was sorry to have missed me, and as soon as he returns home, will run down to see us; but he and his wife are going on for a tour in Scotland, and will not be back till next month. If all comes right between you two, I don't see that I'll have much left to wish for. I feel pretty sure—always did—that Tom's heart was in the right place—it's his wife who made the mischief; she didn't like to lose her anchorage in Mervyn Hall, it was her 'vantage ground. Eh, Janet! my Jo Janet! and you'll not be hard on your brother, my pet?"

"Hard on Tom! no, certainly not! Why should I, dad? I do not feel inclined to be hard on anyone!"

"That's right! I'll show you his letter after dinner. I'll swear he wrote it in his own room all by himself, before he joined madam," and the old man winked with tremendous knowingness.

As soon as they had finished dinner,

Captain Rowley settled himself with his pipe in the verandah, and handed his son's letter to Janet.

"My dear father," it ran, "I am extremely sorry I had left the office before you called, for you must know that I am always glad to see you, though I entirely disagree with you as regards my sister's conduct, which I look upon as simply suicidal. Had you steadily set your face against it, and refused her shelter, she would most probably have returned to Palliser, whose wife she certainly was in the sight of Heaven.

"I hear, however, that he shows little regard for the tie which existed between them, and is on the eve of marriage; so possibly Janet may have had more to complain of than has come to light. Therefore, in accordance with your wish, I am willing to bury the past and be on friendly terms with her in future.

"I shall run down for a day as soon as we return from Scotland, where we are going to

take a little tour until the middle of September. I shall do my best to bring my wife round to my views, but as she has very strong views on the subject of morality, it may take time. Looking forward with pleasure to seeing you,

"I am, your affectionate son,

"THOS. ROWLEY."

Janet slowly re-folded it and put it back in its envelope.

"There is some hope for me in the prospect of Mrs. Tom's condoning my offence," she said with a quiet smile, "meantime, I will possess my soul in patience, and receive Tom as usual."

"That's right, that is wiselike!" said Captain Rowley in a tone of satisfaction, while Janet thought her father was thankful for small mercies.

The following week was marked by the return of her friend, Mrs. Bent, whose society and the interest she took in her friend's children, was perhaps Janet's greatest

comfort, outside her home. Also by the following announcement:

"On the 17th instant, at the British Embassy, Paris, by the Rev. St. John Robinson, Randal Palliser, of Mervyn Hall, Southshire, to the Honourable Hildegarde, only child of Lord de Courcy."

So that chapter of her life was completely closed—closed with the sound of wedding bells, which is better, Janet thought, than a mourning knell—certainly she did not feel mournful. Captain Rowley made no observation on the subject, but Janet spoke of it calmly, and then gave him an account of her meeting with Palliser.

The old man muttered—"Heartless scoundrel!" between his teeth, and after a minute's pause asked gently:

"Tell me, my child, do you never regret all you have given up?"

"No, dearest dad! I am too well content with all I have gained," and she kissed his brow tenderly.

August had gone by, and September came in with a spell of sultry weather and cloudy skies, and an occasional rough but warm breeze, which made the atmosphere still more oppressive.

Mrs. Bent began to talk of expecting her brother, who seemed rather uncertain as to his movements.

"I do not know what is the matter with Maurice," she said one afternoon as she sat at tea with Janet; "he does not seem as happy as he was when he arrived, and he is so restless too! Oh, by the way, he took an excursion up the Caledonian Canal after he left that place where he was shooting, and he met your brother and his wife on the steamer. They appear to have travelled together for a couple of days."

"Indeed!" said Janet, and the thought that it was a junction of forces inimical to herself flashed across her mind.

"Everyone is restless now," she resumed. "I had a letter from Lady Saville this morning; she says she has made up her mind

to pay Alexander a visit, and will start for India in October. She is going to stay with some relations in Norfolk first, so she must leave Lady Darrell soon. Then I have promised to go to her—I have postponed my visit as I best could, for I much prefer having Lady Darrell to myself."

"Where is her son?" asked Mrs. Bent.

"At his own place. He has not been much there this year, and is to have a succession of shooting parties."

"How nice it must be to pack up and leave for the ends of the earth when one chooses, like Lady Saville," remarked Mrs. Bent, pensively.

"The power of money is great, but riches and poverty are relative! I never feel poor, though we are obliged to be very careful. Of course I may want something one day very badly and not be able to get it, then, I suppose, I shall crave for riches!"

"I have stayed too long with you, Janet, I always do! I promised to meet Mr. Bent at home at five o'clock! Are you going out?"

"Yes, I am obliged to go out rather reluctantly to return a visit — rather an unusual task for me. A few days ago, returning from a ramble with my father, I found cards—Colonel Bethune and Lady Katherine Bethune—and a letter of introduction from Lady Darrell. I did know these people were coming, but I had no idea the regiment had arrived. Lady Katherine is a cousin of Lady Darrell, and she said she intended to introduce her kinswoman to me, so I am bound to return the visit."

"Then Colonel Bethune commands the — Light Dragoons? I have heard they are rather gay and gorgeous people."

"And therefore most unsuited to us, as no doubt Lady Katherine will soon discover. However, I must put on my best bonnet and give her an opportunity of judging."

"If Lady Katherine takes you up, Janet,' began Mrs. Bent.

"She cannot take me up, unless I choose it," interrupted Janet quietly, and Mrs. Bent felt she had made a mistake.

So after a rapid toilette Janet started with her friend, and walked most of the way back with her, till they separated at "the parting of the ways."

But as is often the case with first visits, made at the orthodox time of day, Lady Katherine was out, so Janet could only repay pasteboard with pasteboard, and stroll home along the Common, taking herself to task for the shy reluctance she felt to make a new acquaintance.

A few mornings later, when Janet came down to breakfast, she found her father beaming over a letter he was reading.

"There," he said, when he had kissed her and said good-morning. "It's from Tom," handing her the letter.

It was brief but kindly. They were starting next day for London, and the following Saturday he would run down to Beachurst and remain till Sunday evening.

"I am very glad," observed Janet, laying down the letter. "You will be pleased to see him."

"Well, let me see, it's good eighteen months since I saw him. What *would* please me, my pet, would be to see my two children real good friends before I die."

"I shall do my best, dearest dad. And you are going to see us good friends for many a long year, though I do not fancy Mrs. Tom will ever quite forgive me; still," with a sweet pleasant laugh, "I can quite forgive her, for I understand her, and I suspect understanding means forgiving in most cases. At the same time, dear, we must not let Tom fancy he is entitled to forgive *me!*"

"Ah! you'll manage him, Jeannie, you always could—when you took the trouble. And you are not half as full of fight as you used to be."

"You see I am by no means so sure of being right as I was when I was younger. The wider one's experiences the less firm one's convictions."

"Ay! that's true," returned her father, and went on contentedly with his breakfast.

"It is a wild, blustery morning," said Janet, looking out of the window. "There will be a grand sea when the tide is full in. It is much colder, too, and damp, and here comes a dash of rain, that may make the wind drop. I have told Mrs. Brown to light a wood fire in your den, it will be more cheerful. Have you any pain in your shoulder?"

"No, not a twinge."

He rose from table and carefully collected the morsels of broken bread and toast into a little basket for his fowls.

"Don't go out in this weather," urged Janet. "Lucy can attend to the chickens for once. Just sit down by the fire and read."

"All right! you're in command of the deck," said the old man cheerfully. He rose, and taking the newspaper, migrated into his comfortable little study. "Ha! this is snug," he exclaimed, spreading his hands to the flame. "Extraordinary weather, quite warm yesterday, glass gone down to stormy—this

morning, wind freshening. We'll have half a gale at least, presently."

Janet put a footstool under his feet.

"There is the new *Minerva* for you, so you can read my famous description of the Roman Villa. You will see that I steer clear of dates, except one or two that are generally known. I treat the whole thing from an imaginative point of view, and steal nothing from nobody! I am not sure that Mr. Valentine is very pleased. He only says it will do, and I see he has cut out nearly a page."

"Set him up," exclaimed Captain Rowley, putting on his glasses with a critical air. "It's too good for him. Thank you, my pet," as she put on some more wood. "Faith! you take such care of me, I begin to believe I'll be another old Parr. I've been the happiest old boy in or out of the service, since you came back to me, and I begin to hope your life has not been spoiled either! You have true, strong friends behind you."

"I have you and that's best of all," she

said with a smile, blowing him a kiss as she left the room to attend to her household duties, her face growing grave, a sad expression stealing into her eyes as she thought—"Yes, I can make him happy and myself content, and perhaps, happy too, but something has gone out of my life that will never return, and nearly all my youth has gone with it! Still, there may be unlooked-for good in the future. Shall I ever be quite indifferent to the doubt with which I am regarded? At best the verdict upon me is, 'not proven.' Time, however, obliterates almost every mark, and in time will——"

Here she reached the kitchen, and a leading question from "General Brown" arrested her attention.

When she returned to the den, Captain Rowley was still deep in his daughter's lucubrations.

She therefore sat down to write a long letter to Lady Saville, and the morning went swiftly in her usual occupations.

After luncheon the rain ceased and the wind abated considerably.

"Well, I'll make my way down to the club," said Captain Rowley, after a long look at the sky and sea.

"I wish you would take me to Laurel Lodge first," replied Janet. "I promised to help Mary with some planning and cutting out to-day, and I do not like to disappoint her."

"Wrap up well then, and put on over-shoes —the roads are in a horrid state."

Janet obeyed, and father and daughter started—she, glad to feel how steady and firm the old man's arm still was—while he chuckled over the good points of her *Minerva* contribution, which he had read through twice.

At the gate of Mrs. Bent's garden they parted. Janet paused to look after her father as he walked sturdily to the corner of a road just beyond where he turned and waved his good-bye, with a happy smile beaming all over his broad honest face. Then

Janet pushed the gate open and walked to the door.

She received a hearty welcome, as Mrs. Bent hardly hoped she would come, and the two friends were soon deep in consultation over sundry small garments suited to the coming winter.

"I sometimes wonder, Janet, that you have come back to our everyday life of contrivance and economy, as if you had never left it, after the luxury and finery you must have been accustomed to!"

"Well, you see, neither the luxury nor the finery did much towards making me happy. I grew accustomed to them, yes—to a certain degree; but they were always nullified by a sense that they were not rightfully mine, at times it was oppressive. Then again I would forget—I do not think I have any taste for grandeur, I have little or no ambition, I suspect I am very indolent by nature."

"You!" cried Mrs. Bent, "why, you are never idle!"

"One can be indolent, though you do not

sit with your hands on your lap. But my idea of happiness is peace."

"I fear that is because you haven't much hope!"

"Don't fancy I am hopeless, Mary! I am content with the present, and in no way afraid of the future; but the vivid hopefulness that fills one's veins with an indistinct ecstacy, and erects huge air castles —ah! that is gone, has been gone for some years."

"I don't know what would become of me, if I had the faintest doubt that I was all the world to John!" said Mrs. Bent, letting the two lengths of stuff she was pinning together fall on her lap, and gazing across the room with unseeing eyes. "I don't mean to say we are the least sentimental, and we have little tiffs now and then, but I am certain we are ten times more necessary to each other than the day we married, and there is nothing in the world I would not tell him."

"Thank God then, and take courage!" returned Janet, with rather a sad smile.

"Life has scarcely any insurmountable ills for a pair like you, so long as you are left together!"

"Ah, yes! your words involve a terrible possibility, Janet."

"But even if parted, dear Mary, your memory could only present you with sweet and tender pictures of the past!"

Silence fell upon them for a minute or two, and then an important question as to the "cutting" arose, and took some time to decide.

"Is Captain Rowley going to call for you, Janet?"

"I think so. He said he would ask for a cup of tea—I do not fancy he will be here just yet. He had something to do, or to buy, at Kingsport."

"He is looking very well, and seems in such good spirits," remarked Mrs. Bent.

They continued to converse over their work, till the door was opened by one of the servants, who, addressing her mistress, said:

"If you please, 'm, Mr. Thornton would like to speak to you. He is in the drawing-room, 'm."

"Dr. Thornton," repeated Mrs. Bent, who was not personally acquainted with him; "are you sure it is not Mr. Bent he wishes to see?"

"No, 'm, it's you; and first he asked if Mrs. Rowley was here."

Mrs. Bent rose and went out of the room. Janet paused in her work, and wondered what could be the matter. Dr. Thornton was a retired naval surgeon and a club chum of her father's, also of Mr. Bent's. Could anything have happened to her friend's husband, just as they had been speaking of him, of the close tie which existed between them?

"God forbid!" she ejaculated in her heart, and stayed still and silent waiting for her friend's return.

She came soon. The moment Janet's eyes met hers she knew that some catastrophe had happened.

Mrs. Bent was white and trembling, and a look of horror gave a strange wildness to her gentle face.

"Dear Mary! what has happened?" cried Janet, starting up. "Nothing to Mr. Bent, I trust?"

"Oh, no, no!" bursting in tears, "but your dear father, he has met with a sad accident. Come—come and see Dr. Thornton."

Before the words were finished, Janet flew past her to the drawing-room, where she found the bearer of evil tidings, looking pale and haggard. He was a tall, gaunt man, and she was slightly acquainted with him.

"Tell me the whole truth!" she cried, clasping his arm, "and take me to my father!"

"My dear madam!" stammered the agitated man.

Janet stepped back, and looked intently into his troubled eyes.

"He is dead?" she cried, in a terrified but convinced tone.

"I must not deceive you—I—I—alas!—yes—he is—no more"—stammered Thornton.

She was silent for a moment, then with strange composure as if speaking unconsciously, she said:

"Take me to him."

While she spoke, Mrs. Bent appeared in out-door dress, followed by the maid with Janet's wraps.

"I have a carriage outside," said Thornton.

"I do not seem able to believe it!" said Janet, with a dazed look. "But it must be true—you would not give me so cruel a shock unless you were obliged!"

"God knows I would not!" he returned with moist eyes.

They were soon driving in the direction of the beach, and Janet listened to Mr. Thornton's explanation as if to something coming to her ears from afar, yet not a syllable was lost.

It seemed that after sitting for some time at the club chatting over the morning's news, her father had gone down to a little wooden

jetty where the boats which plied for hire used to lie, in order to look at the sea, which was now subsiding.

There were none of the boatmen hanging about as usual, the weather being too bad to give promise of a job. Only a few boys were playing on the jetty, and as he stood at the top of the steps, Captain Rowley saw one of the boys slip into the water. The little fellow, however, managed to catch hold of one of the timbers, and for a moment saved himself from the backward sweep of the water. Captain Rowley shouted "Hold on!" and ran down the steps to help him. Before he could reach him, however, the wave returned and swept him away; either Captain Rowley, who had been an expert swimmer, went after him, or was himself caught by the retreating tide—both were seen struggling in the water.

Attracted by the screams of the boys who witnessed the incident, the sailors rushed from the shelter of a big boathouse built high upon the beach, and soon launched a

boat to rescue the bodies, if they could do no more. But the tide was running out at tremendous speed, and it might have been days before either would have been regained, had they not by some chance been swept into a space of sheltered water behind the steamboat pier, a large stone structure about a mile lower down. At first they found the boy's body—he was alive but insensible, afterwards they recovered that of Captain Rowley, who was quite dead. It was supposed that after supporting the boy for some time, he was seized with cramp, and sank.

At the time Janet scarce seemed to take in these details, but afterwards she found them clear and ineffaceably stamped upon her brain. She felt as if moving in some painful dream till she came to the boat-house, and found herself in the silent, majestic presence of death. Still and unutterably peaceful the dear old man lay, his homely features touched with the beauty and dignity so often bestowed by the king of terrors upon

his victims. It was sleep—heavenly sleep—as if he was conscious that sin, and sorrow, and suffering had passed away for ever.

Janet had hitherto been profoundly quiet and quite tearless, but when she saw the dear, familiar face thus glorified by the transfiguration of death, she uttered a despairing cry.

"Speak to me, father! Once more—only once more! Oh, do not leave me!" and kneeling down she kissed the ice-cold cheek, shuddering at the contact, as Nature will shudder at the touch of the lifeless, however dear and cherished. "Is there no help?" she cried passionately. "The nearly drowned are sometimes brought back to life!"

Thornton shook his head, and with an expressive gesture pointed to the various appliances which lay around.

"Believe me, nothing was left undone before we decided on sending for you. At first, I hoped to bring you comfort, but——"

Then her tears burst forth, the picture of rest and happiness in the recumbent figure before her touching the deep reservoir of her

tenderness, unchecked by one bitter or remorseful thought; she kissed his brow, she lovingly stroked back his grey hairs, while her frame shook with sobs, and the big tears rolled down her cheeks unheeded. At last, Mrs. Bent passed her arm through hers, and led her unresistingly away.

Janet was helpless and exhausted—she let her friend do what she would and scarcely knew what was going on around her, till she found herself at her own home. Mrs. Brown was holding the door open with one hand, and her apron to her eyes with the other.

Mr. Bent was there and Mr. Thornton, and they seemed busy writing. The former was very gentle and grave, he said:

"Let me have your brother's address—I want to send him a telegram. Try to bear up under this terrible blow. Mary shall stay with you—we will all do what we can for you."

Janet gave him her brother's private address, remembering he would be at home that evening; she did everything they told

her—even tried to eat a biscuit and drink a little wine, while a muffled movement pervaded the house, and officials came and went, and gradually all settled down into the silence of night.

Then through the long, sleepless hours, by the glimmer of a flickering watch-light, Janet collected her faculties, and realised that she was indeed—alone.

CHAPTER IX.

"IT CANNOT BE."

When Janet came out of her room next morning she found her brother awaiting her.

He had started immediately on reaching home, where he found the telegram, but arrived so late at Beachurst that he went to an hotel, not wishing to disturb his sister at such an hour.

The sight of his well-known features seemed to efface all intermediate incidents, and carry Janet back to the dear old happy days when they used to quarrel and "make up" with equal facility, all bitterness, all irritation—if she had ever felt either—disappeared, and she threw her arms round him as she used to do, in the warm reconciliations of their childish days.

He had come at last, but too late! Too

late for that re-union to which their father had looked forward.

"Tom—dear Tom—I am so thankful you wrote to him as you did! He was hoping to see you—he seemed full of hope about everything—I don't know why."

Tom was deeply affected, and pressed his sister to him kindly, but this did not prevent his saying:

"No—poor old fellow!—I don't know either. I'm sure he had enough to break his heart."

"Yet he was very happy," she returned. "Come and look. When I cannot control my grief, it calms me to look at him."

Seeing her brother was greatly moved, Janet stole away and left him alone with the dead.

Then came all the inevitable business which death entails. These were taken off Janet's hands by her brother and Mrs. Bent, and the fact of having little or nothing to do made the days more cruelly oppressive, while the consciousness that time alone would enable

her to realise all she had lost in losing her beloved companion grew clearer.

As she grew calmer and more mistress of herself, so the road of life which stretched before her seemed more parched and stony, with many a pebble and many a thorn to bruise and pierce her wandering feet. Yet, she had a brave heart and never for an instant did she regret the step she had taken —she tried to fix her mind on the present, and leave the future to arrange itself.

Though they issued but few invitations to the funeral, many acquaintances begged leave to attend. Maurice Winyard hastened from Scotland, and Lord Darrell came on the morning of the appointed day, having travelled all night.

The day of the funeral is probably the worst of all the days of mourning. Then the dear and precious outer shell of the being we loved and held close commune with is taken away, and the last visible links are severed — henceforth, he is but a memory! Janet felt as if it tore her heart, that last look

before the coffin was screwed down; then, indeed, she felt that all was over.

When she saw her brother that afternoon, he seemed quite himself, and anxious to finish all business matters in order to return to Town.

"Well, Janet, it has been a trying day for you! I must say you are a brave girl, and don't give any trouble. Now, if you like to tell me anything of the dear old man's affairs, I shall be happy to listen, but it's not necessary, you know. He told me some time ago that he left you all he possessed, so everything is yours. I hope you'll find enough to live on. This house ought to fetch a good bit more than he gave for it; he improved it a good deal, and the place is improving. If you wish to dispose of it I'll see to the business for you. I don't like the idea of your being pinched, but I can't help remembering that you have only yourself to blame for it."

"No doubt," said Janet, with a wan smile, "and I do not blame myself at all. But I

should like you to read the will; take it with you, my dear Tom, and settle about it. There are some souvenirs for you. His watch and chain and a portrait of our mother. Do not be uneasy about me, I shall have enough for my few needs. When I can think and make any plan, I will let you know."

"I should like to take you back to Town with me," began Tom hesitatingly, "but, to be frank, I'm not sure it would be quite pleasant for you, considering Julia's views, and——"

"Believe me, Tom, it is wiser not to worry your wife. I do not expect everyone to see things with my eyes. I am quite willing to be friendly with her when she holds out her hand to me, but I am in no hurry."

"No, you are cocksure you are right—you always were—only you are too cool to be disagreeable. Come in!"

This in reply to a knock at the door, whereupon Mrs. Brown entered with a note and said:

"Waiting for an answer, please, 'm."

Janet took and glanced through it, and then handed it to her brother. He read:

"Dear Mrs. Rowley,

"I hope you will not think me intrusive if I ask you to see me for a few minutes. I shall not leave till to-morrow, if you prefer seeing me in the morning. I have promised my mother to give a report of you and to give you a message if possible.

"Yours, with sincerest sympathy,

"Darrell."

"Well?" asked Tom, looking up, a little surprise in his eyes.

"I will see him to-day. I need not delay his journey. His mother is my best friend, and my dear father was quite fond of him," said Janet. She traced a few lines of reply, and sent it to the messenger.

"I suppose I had better be off," exclaimed her brother.

"No; why should you? You have met Lord Darrell, and as it was so friendly of

him to come all this long way to show respect to the dear father, you ought to see him."

"Very well," said Tom, and continued to look over some papers Janet had given him, while she sat gazing in sad thought at the fire, which Mrs. Brown had kindled to give something of cheerfulness to the room. It seemed a very short time since the answer to Lord Darrell's note had been despatched, when, somewhat to their surprise, he was announced.

"It is very good of you to admit me," he said, in a voice of much feeling. "I should not have ventured to ask, but that my mother particularly desired me to see you if possible."

"In times of trouble the face of a friend is doubly welcome," said Janet, giving him her hand. "I think you know my brother, Lord Darrell."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Rowley," he said, and they shook hands.

"I must not trespass long on your kindness," he resumed. "My mother is with you

in spirit, as I believe she has told you, but she is most anxious you should go to her at once; she is quite alone, and will invite no one, so you will not be annoyed by the presence of strangers. She begs me to impress upon you the necessity of keeping up your strength and buoyancy. If you let these go, it will be hard to regain them. Then she thinks you might make your winter plans in concert, after—after the first effects of this cruel blow have passed away. Pray do not hurry into any arrangements until you have had change and rest."

"Your mother is only too good," said Janet, holding back her tears with difficulty at the sound of his sympathetic voice. "It is hardly fair to impose so melancholy a guest upon her as I shall be!"

"She desires nothing more than your presence. Lady Saville will delay her departure for a while, hoping to see you at the Dingle (my mother's abode). If you will say when you shall be ready to travel, my mother proposes to send Edwards (you know, her

right-hand man) to see you safely through the journey."

"She is always thoughtful and considerate, but I want no help in travelling. I will write fully to Lady Darrell, and, if I possibly can, accept her most kindly invitation, but both my head and heart are still dazed and confused, though, believe me, I do not wish to sit down and give myself up to helpless sorrow."

"No; that would not be like *you*. I shall tell my mother then that she may hope to see you as soon as you can conveniently leave. Now, I shall say good bye for some time, as I shall be detained at Woodlands for the rest of the autumn." He paused an instant, and added in a low tone, "Believe me, after yourselves, none can mourn the terrible loss you have sustained more than I do."

He kissed the hand she held out to him with an air of respectful sadness, and left the room followed by Tom, who had listened intently to the conversation, and stored it up in his mind for repetition to Mrs. Tom.

"If she will only understand that Janet is petted and sought after by-the Bigwigs," he thought, "and Palliser's own sister into the bargain, I'll be able to manage her."

He found his sister weeping bitterly on his return from saying good-bye to Darrell. The tears she had held back with difficulty could be no longer restrained. Darrell's familiar presence recalled the pleasant days they had spent together so lately, and her father's enjoyment of them.

"You'll make yourself ill, Janet, if you give way like this," said Tom, who was in the usual masculine condition under such circumstances of not knowing what to say.

"Don't mind me, Tom, I was so long unable to shed tears. They are such a relief."

Then her brother expounded the necessity of his going up to Town the next day, as "business must be attended to," but professed his readiness to come to her whenever she wanted him, and advised her strongly to accept Lady Darrell's invitation.

"It will be good for you in every way," he concluded significantly.

"No doubt," she returned with a faint smile. "Perhaps my association with Lady Darrell may help to reconcile your wife to me, Tom."

"Perhaps so," said Tom stoutly, "as the connection is through Palliser, and Palliser's sister receives you willingly, it's about as good a backing up as you could have."

"I suppose so," replied Janet quietly, as she left the room to bathe her hot eyes, and recover her composure.

Tom had departed, and the rivulet of everyday life, which nothing can interrupt for long, began to flow on as usual outwardly, but with what a blank within!

Mrs. Bent had remained with her friend until Janet felt she had no right to keep her from her home any longer. While she remained, both Maurice Winyard and his brother-in-law were daily visitors, and Janet felt that her bereavement had broken down some invisible barrier between herself and her old playfellow. He no longer seemed on

guard against his own weakness or warmth; there was a tone of grave tenderness in all he said, an expression of sympathetic consideration in all he did, that thrilled her heart with a strange mixture of pain and pleasure. It was sweet to be thought of and cared for now, when she was so utterly alone. But could she ever again trust any man whose affection had in it the smallest strain of passion, as she was well aware Winyard's had? No, pure friendship might be unchangeable and loyal through all time, but the other love—never again could she believe it to be anything save a broken reed, for it seemed to her inseparably interwoven with fickleness and cruelty.

"And you have made up your mind to go to Devonshire on Tuesday?" said Maurice one afternoon as the daylight was failing; he had brought Janet some books from his sister, and had sat long by the fireside feeling he ought to go, yet lingering.

He had risen and was leaning his arm on the mantel-piece, in which attitude his face

was in deep shadow while the firelight showed hers distinctly. How pale and sad it looked, how pathetic her large eyes! It was heartless of him, no doubt, but he had been happier in those quiet interviews since the good old captain's death, than at any other time during his stay in England.

"I have," returned Janet. "If I stay much longer, I shall never tear myself away from this place. I feel I am taking root here, and I have a dread of becoming morbid and useless. Lady Darrell's invitation is the best possible chance I could have of escaping from myself; she is a delightful companion, so strong and sensible, but never hard."

"I suppose she is very superior to her son, intellectually?" said Maurice.

"I am not sure. I used to think so, but Lord Darrell sometimes startles me by his keen power of observation. At all events, he seems to have the wisdom of a sound heart," returned Janet thoughtfully.

"I have been paying you an unconscionably long visit," said Winyard, still resting his

eyes on her pale expressive face. "But I have a strange reluctance to leave you alone —quite alone, in this house," glancing round.

"Do not apologise for staying with me," she replied with the gentle composure he felt so baffling. "I am glad of your company, but loneliness has no terror for me. When I sit here and think of the last days my dear father and I spent together, the memory of his hopeful contentment is the greatest comfort to me. He was happy, and in a moment, with little or no suffering, they tell me, he passed from a bright present to—what?—certainly not gloom nor torture. That I could never believe."

"It is a question we had better leave alone," said Winyard gravely.

"I *do* leave it alone! I feel it my duty to do my best in this world, not to speculate about the next!" she returned.

"I am going to town next week," resumed Maurice, after a brief pause. "General R— wants to see me, and I fancy it is about an appointment which, if I accept it, may take me

back to India before the expiration of my leave."

"Is your health quite re-established, Maurice?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, I trust this appointment will be a long step in advance; you must be ambitious, you as a man may be. *I* am ambitious for you."

"You make me ambitious, Janet." He stopped abruptly, and then resumed. "And Lady Darrell's servant is coming to be your escort?"

"Yes, he is. He always acts as her courier when she is abroad."

"Is Lord Darrell with his mother?"

"No. He is very busy about some improvements at Woodlands. There is no one with Lady Darrell but Gertrude—I mean Lady Saville—that is one reason why I am going so soon, I should like to see her. Pray write to me, Maurice, when you have seen this old general—at least, I suppose he is old."

"May I write to you?" asked Winyard earnestly.

"Why should you not?"

He did not reply.

"I must leave you then, or you will send me away."

"Good-bye for the present," she said.

As the door closed after him, she returned to her chair, and sat for some time in deep thought, her brows slightly knit, and the sad curve of her mouth stiffened into a more resolute expression than they had taken since her great bereavement. At last she roused herself with a sigh, and rang for Mrs. Brown, to hold counsel as to the arrangements during her absence.

* * * * *

Janet was not disappointed in the effect she anticipated from the change of scene, and the tonic of Lady Darrell's society. She felt her spirit slowly reviving, and the prospect of a lonely life less appalling, while the memory of the dear old man began to be a pleasure as well as a grief.

Lady Saville only stayed a few days after her arrival; she was in a fever to start, indeed

Janet felt that the postponement of her journey was a strong mark of friendship and regard. Still, she was not sorry to be left with Lady Darrell, who of all her friends and acquaintances was the most congenial. There was no topic on which she could not open her mind to the shrewd, experienced woman who, as Janet had told Winyard, was strong without hardness — tender, without weakness.

After a couple of weeks of reposeful life, during which they spent much of their time in the open air, thanks to the lovely warm October, especially beautiful in the soft Devonshire climate, Lady Darrell considered it time to speak to her young friend of future plans.

"I want to leave England early this year," she began one evening, after Janet had been reading aloud, and they had paused to discuss some of the author's opinions. "That attack of bronchitis last year was a warning, and I want you to come with me, so pray make up your mind, my dear. Pray hear

me out! My first reason for asking you is a selfish one—you will be the greatest possible help and comfort to me; next, it will be the best thing for you—you must take up your life again, dear Janet. There are, I hope and believe, many good useful years before you. Time will heal your wounds; you are too sensible not to hope and expect it will. Now a winter away from all sad associations will help you more than anything else. I want to go to Palermo in November, leaving England not later than the first week, and I want you to come with me as my guest. You say you do not like to sell your house, perhaps you are right, you will want a *pied à terre*, but let it or shut it up. You are free, desolately free, I grant, so come with me, lay up a store of health and sunshine, and when you return, you will take up your life and your pen with renewed vigour."

"My pen," repeated Janet with some surprise. "Why do you suggest my pen, Lady Darrell?"

"Because I am aware how you use it. I

attacked Valentine on the subject—he did not deny my accusation. They were not badly done, those little descriptive bits, and you will improve. Come then and gather fresh material for copy; you shall have plenty of time to scribble."

"Your invitation is most tempting, and believe me, I see the great, generous consideration for me which prompts you. I have no one to consult, and I should be unwise and ungrateful to refuse."

"Well said," cried Lady Darrell, highly pleased. "Now I like that quick decision. We will set to work, and make all our plans. I shall let you off a week of your visit here. Settle everything at Beachurst, and we will meet in London on the 5th—Guy Fawkes' day—starting on the 7th or 8th for Rome, and after a short rest go on to our destination."

The remainder of the evening was spent in discussing their plans and the requisite purchases to be made in Town.

Janet had expected that Maurice would have written to her much sooner than he did,

and when a letter reached her, there was a tone of constraint in it at which she smiled somewhat sadly. He had seen General R——, but nothing had been decided. When was she coming back? He would like to tell her some particulars about the proposed appointment. Would she write to him?—if it were not asking too much. Then he signed himself her sincere and attached friend, Maurice Winyard.

Mrs. Bent, hearing of Janet's intended return at an earlier date than at first fixed, begged her to take up her abode at Laurel Lodge.

Janet, however, declined. She preferred being in her own abode, both on account of the time thus secured for the regulating of matters for an absence of six months, and the strong home feeling she had for the pretty little place. Here she seemed still to live with her father, and at times unconsciously listened for his cheery tones. She frequently dined with the Bents, and two or three times Mrs. Bent spent an evening at

the Bungalow. But when alone, Janet often forced herself to picture her future, the probable current of life in the home provided for her. Already the sharp surprise of the world—*her* world—at her eccentric conduct had been blunted, and the death of her father had helped to knit up the ravelled skein of some friendships which she feared had been severed—notably the Winyards. Both the Vicar and his wife wrote to her after her bereavement with the warmest sympathy, and perhaps nothing was more soothing to Janet than this token of renewed regard.

She was resting one afternoon in the dining-room, after a busy morning of "covering up" and "putting away." The old-fashioned couch was drawn up to the fire, and a china bowl filled with sprays of fern and the last chrysanthemums from the greenhouse stood upon the table. Janet was tired —mentally and physically, and had stretched herself on the sofa with a new book, one of several sent her by the friendly editor, when Mrs. Brown came in with a smiling face.

"Please, 'm, here's Captain Winyard."

Janet was on her feet in a second, and went forward to meet him.

He seemed very grave, but had a certain satisfied air, and a comparison between this composed, soldierly, resolute-looking man, and the bright, affectionate boy whose heart spoke so freely in his eyes, flashed through her mind with the quickness and vividness of lightning. She was very, very glad to see him and told him so more in the tone of her voice than in words.

"Mary and I were talking of you last night," she said, when they had exchanged greetings, and Maurice had taken a chair opposite to her. "She was wondering what had become of you."

"I know I have been a bad correspondent. I have been a good deal occupied, and it was only the day before yesterday that I decided about the appointment I spoke of to you. I have accepted it and must leave England in January."

"Indeed! I trust, Maurice, it is not only

a good position, but a stepping stone to something still better."

"I think it is," he said slowly; "at first it consists chiefly of the command of a small frontier post and will condemn me to a very isolated life, but I do not fancy that will last long——"

He stopped abruptly.

"I do not think you care much about society."

"I am no hermit," he returned, and was again silent, while his eyes dwelt on her with something sad, yet tender in their expression.

"You saw Lady Saville when she was in Town?" resumed Janet.

"Yes, I dined with her; she is a most agreeable, amusing woman, and such a devoted mother, that I can't believe the scandal that was whispered about her long ago, before I left home."

"What was it? I knew there was something."

"They say she was on the point of going off with some fellow in the Guards, but that

her brother"—he hesitated a moment, and then went on rapidly—"found it out, stopped her and made it all right with her husband."

"If it *was* true, it was all Sir Frederic's fault," returned Janet. "I think he drove her nearly out of her mind; still, I hardly believe it."

"No, nor I. It is to me incredible that a woman should think lightly of her marriage vows."

"And to me," said Janet quietly. A pause followed, then she went on—"So I must bid you good-bye now, Maurice, for I am to meet Lady Darrell in London next week. I have promised to spend the winter with her at Palermo."

"Good-bye," repeated Maurice. "That is a word I cannot bring myself to say, not to you, as no doubt you know! I thought I loved you in our early days, but it was as nothing to the mingled torment and delight of being near you now. I have resisted your attraction, for—for many reasons, nay! hear me out; we differ on many essential

points, but it is all in vain—life without you is not worth having. I have not much in the way of worldly advantages to offer, but Janet, will you be my wife? With a new name in another country, the past will be obliterated and——"

He caught her hand in both his own, she was trembling, she was greatly moved.

"Now you must hear me," she interrupted. "I am infinitely surprised, Maurice. I never imagined you could so far forgive what you consider my wrongdoing."

"I could forgive you anything, everything," he cried, kissing the hand he held.

Gently shaking her head, she withdrew it.

"You might forgive now, for you are not in your right mind at this moment. But, Maurice, the memory of Randal Palliser's passionate tenderness, his assurances that life without me was intolerable, is still fresh in my mind, yet in less than two years he made me feel I was an unprofitable burden. I do not think you would have done that, you have a truer heart, a finer nature! Had

we married when I was young, Maurice, we might have been very, very happy, and loved each other heartily; but it is too late now, quite too late, the shadow of my past would always come between us, you would never trust me thoroughly, and I never could endure what I do not deserve."

"Good God! Janet, will you turn from me for such a fanciful idea, when—when you half confess you like me?"

"I dare not marry you, Maurice! You say you love me passionately—I believe you do at present; well, I dread that too! Believe me, dear old friend, you will be far happier with some girl who has no history and no fixed opinions, who will love you as you ought to be loved, and defer to you, as no doubt you deserve, but as perhaps I might not, on all subjects."

"And do you intend to live alone all your life? You are not suited to such an existence, Janet!"

"It is impossible to say what the future has in store. Hereafter, when my wounds

are quite healed, I may meet some friendly congenial, elderly man who needs a companion and a partner, and we might marry in deference to the opinions of society."

"As if any man on earth would consider *you* in that light! Janet, is there no chance for me? I am not one of those fellows who are ready to try again and again!"

"I am sure you are not! Ah! I hate to vex or grieve you, Maurice! I almost wish I could marry you, but I must not, and I will not."

Her tone was final.

Winyard rose. His face was set and white, his brows were knit.

"It is good-bye then," he said, "and a long good-bye."

He hesitated for half a second, turned and left the house.

Janet stood quite still, perhaps a minute passed, then she sat down, buried her face in her hands, and wept quietly, till Mrs. Brown came in with the tea-tray.

CHAPTER X.

FRIENDSHIP.

Winter in Sicily was more delightful, physically delightful, than anything Janet had ever yet known. It was absolutely restful, and so entirely unlike her experiences hitherto, that her thoughts were drawn away from the past, by the absence of everything associated with it. The softness and beauty of her surroundings lulled her like some delicious opiate. Her knowledge of Italy had till now been limited to the north, where the Gothic element strengthens and hardens the life of the people. Here the glow of colour, the luxuriousness of nature, the loveliness of the dark-eyed women, heightened by their picturesque head covering, the caressing smiles of the olive-skinned

children, all was more than Italian, showing the Greek strain inherited from the old colonists.

Lady Darrell had been there before, and did not care to repeat her sight-seeing, but she insisted on Janet's taking time and liberty to wander at will.

"Steep yourself in the colour of the place," was her advice. "It will be a splendid addition to the treasures of your memory, and you may never come here again."

So Janet wandered and gazed, and admired the grand old staircases and courtyards, the orange gardens flecked with gold, the walls looking south reddened with Bougainvillia, the summer flowers of England now blooming in the gardens, and mocking at winter; the dim, solemn churches, misty with the breath of incense, the gaily-painted carts, their harness glittering with glass and metal, decked here and there with fox-tails, and joyous with their noisy bells; she delighted in it all, and rejoiced in the chance of observing a life so different from the earnest,

active, neutral-tinted existence of her own cloud-wrapped, sober-minded land.

Lady Darrell had secured quarters in a villa close to the town, once belonging to a noble family, and now let in *étages* to winter visitors. Though somewhat decayed, it was still charming, with a broad double flight of shallow steps to the entrance, statues in niches, round the inner side of the court yard, where peacocks strutted and sometimes screamed, while pigeons wheeled, swooped, or perched, cooing, on the roof over the wealth of Banksia roses, heliotrope, and mignonette below.

Notwithstanding the difference of age between them, Lady Darrell and Janet were excellent company to each other. Intelligence struck a sort of balance between them, it ripened the latter's youth and kept the former fresh and keenly alive to present interests and improvements. Then they enjoyed the same kind of literature, and Janet was amused by Lady Darrell's financial faculty and her strict economy, which yet

never degenerated into stinginess or illiberality, and indeed she learnt a good deal from it.

The choice of Palermo for a winter residence was most successful. Lady Darrell was in excellent health throughout their stay, and even saw something of the little English colony who were passing the season there, but not till after Christmas, nor till she was sure that Janet was not averse to a little society.

Lord Darrell, meantime, stayed steadily at home, hunting and shooting diligently, but he proved an excellent correspondent, his letters being equally distributed between his mother and Janet, to whom, though greatly fascinated by her present life, her English letters were immensely interesting.

Mrs. Bent did not write very frequently, but when she did, she filled her letter with small details respecting family matters and mutual friends which are so delightfully satisfying to the soul of a distant correspondent. Then—wonder of wonders!—Mrs. Tom Rowley relaxed so far as to address her

erring sister-in-law in most friendly terms, and expressed a hope that she would "put up" with them when she returned to England. Janet sat long with this letter in her hand, thinking how pleased the dear old father would have been to know that the family were united once more. Well, she would do nothing to endanger its peace—any wish of her beloved parent was precious to her, and she would strive to carry it out. So she penned a judicious and inoffensive reply, even promising to give a few days to her brother and his wife as she passed through Town on her way to Beachurst, where she had made up her mind to reside.

Mrs. Bent's Christmas letter, however, contained startling news. After some effusive good wishes, the epistle went on thus:

"I have been so upset that I can hardly write coherently. Maurice has been down here a good deal lately, and constantly with the Grants, but it never struck me as anything remarkable; you may imagine my

astonishment when he walked in on Saturday afternoon and, after standing with his back to the fire in silence for a few minutes, he said suddenly:

"'Mary, I am going to be married.'

"I could only repeat:

"'Married!'

"'Yes,' he said. 'Married to Colonel Grant's daughter.'

"I could not help exclaiming:

"'Why, she is a mere child!'

"'Perhaps so,' he returned, 'but a gentle, womanly child, who will, no doubt, develop into a valuable, sympathetic wife, and suit me far better than a highly intellectual woman, crammed with crotchets about her rights and wrongs—at all events, she will be my wife, and you must like her for my sake, Mary!'

"Of course I kissed him and cried a little. The next day I went to call upon my future sister-in-law — such an unformed, young thing, not eighteen yet, but certainly pretty—and natural! I can't make out whether

Maurice is very fond of her or not; he seems to feel the gravity of the step he is about to take; they are to be married on the tenth — isn't it a hurried business? — and start at once for India. She is going for a few days to the Vicarage next week. For myself, I feel quite low and miserable! I seem to have lost Maurice, and he was always a dear brother to me."

This letter was not so great a surprise to Janet as her friend expected it would be. She had somehow gathered the idea that Maurice, who was domestic in his tastes, wished, in an abstract way, to marry, and would like to put an insurmountable barrier between his old love and himself.

"I could have been very fond of him," mused Janet, as she put away the letter, "had I not seen his deep distrust, his suspicion. If it had been in him to cast everything to the winds, save love of me, then I might have been foolish enough to listen to him, and, after all, that might have ended in a reaction,

which would have been a worse shipwreck than the first. I trust he will be happy—he will be, I believe; honour and duty are so much to him! I hope he will make that poor child happy. Ah! love is a dangerous delight! For the future I will only seek and cultivate friendship—there is no treachery, no cruelty in steady, temperate liking."

She sighed as she let her thoughts wander away to the dear, bright, old days when she went a-nutting and gathering blackberries with Maurice in Mervyn Woods.

* * * * *

In February, Lord Darrell surprised them by his unannounced arrival. He said he had been deeply hurt because his mother had not invited him to join her, so was determined to pounce upon her and her chief counsellor, and discover what mischief they were about. His presence created much more movement in their lives; he knew that land of flowers and golden light well, having often visited it in his yacht, so he organised

expeditions to one interesting place after another, including a party to ascend Mount Etna.

Then he accompanied Janet to visit her favourite haunts, and showed himself to be well read in the historic lore of the place.

In March, Lady Darrell began to talk of turning her face homeward, and her son was a little undecided whether he would stay and escort her, or precede her to England.

"Shall you remain with my mother, who speaks of passing April and May in London?" he asked Janet one afternoon.

They were sitting on the terrace at the back of the villa, from whence they looked out over a lovely stretch of country, open and wooded, and a glimpse of glittering sea, all bounded by a range of deeply blue hills.

"I think not. I have a curious dread of London."

"Why?"

"I scarcely know—yet that is not quite true—the real reason of my dread is, I suspect, the fear of meeting Mr. Palliser."

"You ought to have wiped him out of the book of your remembrance by this time!"

"I have, Lord Darrell, more than I ever dreamed I could. Still, I do not like the idea of meeting him face to face."

"I suppose not! All that will pass away in another year or two! There are few entries on the tablets of the heart that can stand the obliterating effects of time."

"The earliest impressions last longest," murmured Janet.

There was a short silence, then Darrell resumed:

"Then you are going to settle yourself in that pleasant little Bungalow of yours at Beachurst?"

"Yes, it is the only place in the world toward which I have any home feeling!"

"I can't say I like the idea of your living there—you'll be awfully lonely!"

"I do not feel specially lonely at home. You see, it is a home, a shelter—where else could I go?"

"Do you know I have come all this way to make a suggestion on that head?"

"Indeed," said Janet, raising her large soft eyes to his with indolent surprise, "what is it?"

"That you should make Woodlands your headquarters."

Even then she did not catch his meaning, so utterly unprepared was she for what was coming.

"Oh, you are very kind, but Lady Darrell does not want me all the year round!"

"Perhaps not, but her son does."

"What can you mean, Lord Darrell?" She was astounded, not embarrassed.

"I think my meaning is plain enough! I want to persuade you to be my wife."

"You amaze me!" she exclaimed.

"I thought you would be rather surprised. I took great care to keep my designs dark!" he returned, with much composure. "I knew you had such an awful lesson in the school of love and matrimony, that you'd be likely to shy at

the first advance—now do listen like a kind, frank friend! I am not going to talk nonsense and swear I cannot live without you —of course I could—but I would much rather live *with* you!"

"Lord Darrell! this must be some sudden whim! It would be a most unsuitable marriage for you, and annoy your mother greatly!"

"No," returned Darrell with a little triumphant nod; "I have settled everything with her as to my—my wish to marry you! It is no new whim; it began with my first acquaintance with you, developed during that cruise when you began to feel the serpent's trail over your fool's paradise—(ah! I well remember your face then)—and it came to a head at my own place in the winter. Oh no! I wasn't what's called in love, only I found you such a delightful companion, that I determined to hunt for a second edition—another Janet—and marry her as soon as found; but I never found her! Then came that tremendous break-up! I admired your

pluck and principle, and felt a higher degree of friendship (friendship, mind) for you, than ever. So last summer, when the dear old Captain and I used to grow confidential while we were cruising along the coast, I told him my hopes and wishes. He was quite willing that I should go in and win; but warned me to be cautious, and not to scare you, for you had been sickened of love. So be it! Let us try a marriage of esteem and friendship. I am never so well entertained as when I am talking to you, or listening to you. Our tastes are sufficiently alike to make us enjoy things together, and not so much the same as to create monotony! I don't ask you to be in love with me, or imagine me a hero—God knows I am not!—but be kind and sympathetic, and spirit me up to live a more useful life! You shall do whatever you like, for never had man more unbounded confidence in woman than I have in you. Now, will you think over what I have said, and give it favourable consideration? If I could find another Janet, why, I would try to marry

her and leave you alone; but as I cannot, I hope you'll hear reason——"

"There never was a more original proposal!" said Janet, smiling.

"I told you I should never make love, and I have kept my word," said Darrell, "and now I am going over to Messina this evening, to see George Herries, who is there for a few days. Turn the matter over in your mind, talk to my mother if you like! If you won't enter into the bonds of *special* friendship with me, send me a line to that effect, and I'll go straight on to England. If you are disposed to try life in my company, just say you think it might be well if I would return and escort my mother and yourself to London. I don't want to hurry you, but, Janet, I think we might enjoy life together gloriously! We are such good comrades!"

He rose and stretched out his hand, into which she put hers saying:

"However I may decide, I shall always think of you as a generous, true-hearted gentleman!"

"Thank you," said Darrell, pressing the hand he held closely—then he let it go. "Adieu for the present," he said; "write to me at the Hotel d'Espagna, I shall be there till Monday," and raising his hat with a kindly half-entreating smile, he left her.

Janet sat perfectly still in deepest, most earnest thought, until the sound of wheels roused her, and she rose to go and meet Lady Darrell, who had returned from her drive.

* * * * *

Four days after, Lord Darrell received the following note:

"Dear Lord Darrell,

"Your mother thinks (and so do I), that it would be very nice if you could return and escort us to London.

"Always your sincere friend,

"Janet."

THE END.

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